John Byrne's

NEXTMEN™

LIES

BOOK 6

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Story and art by John Byrne

Colors by Matt Webb
Cover painting by Gary Cody

Introduction by Frank Miller

a Bchry Scan

Dark Horse Comics®

INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago . . . yeah, it had to have been about twenty years ago, that morning in New York when I started trying to convince an editor that I was ready for my first regular work in comic books. I'd been offered a gig from another publisher but had held out, hoping for a job from Marvel Comics. Marvel Comics was, after all, *the* place to work.

How times change.

But back *then* . . .

. . . back then, there was a palpable sense of *something* happening at Marvel Comics. Something *beginning* to happen, anyway. After a long dry spell following Marvel's glory days of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, there was, if not vigorous activity, at least a pulse.

I got the job I was after, but not before being shown a stack of original artwork from the *X-Men*, a comic that had shot from obscurity to the top of the charts in a space of a few months. *X-Men*'s success was doubly remarkable: not only had the series been discontinued for many a year, but, of all of Jack Kirby and Stan Lee's creations, it had been one of the least popular to begin with, even back in the late '60s, when it seemed that anything bearing the Marvel brand would leap from the stands. But there it was, the *X-Men*, selling the kind of numbers many in the industry thought they'd never see again.

"This is the man to beat," said the editor, Jo Duffy, as I studied the sheets of bristol board. They were drawn by John Byrne and inked with crisp precision by his partner Terry Austin. The popularity of the "John Byrne look" was widely attributed to the profusion of intricate detail that covered just about every inch of every panel. But anybody can cover a page with meaningless lines (as much of what now passes for Marvel Comics will demonstrate). There was more here than eye candy, more than a skilled beginner's enthusiasm. What made Byrne's *X-Men* stand above its imitators was its graceful and witty attention to *character*. Even in shots that featured a dozen or more heroes and villains, each one of them, like a good actor, practiced his quirks and projected his personality. In a genre so homogenized that characters had to wear their initials on their chests to distinguish them, one from another, John's needed no such ornament. He routinely proved this by leaving them in civilian dress.

Character, and its brother-value, *story*. Always a writer, even during the years the old factory system wouldn't allow him to write the words himself, John showed that drama — as well as good composition — sprang from the *content* of the work, not from the empty exercise of visual pyrotechnics. As his work has matured, John has let much of the niggling details fall away and has let story and character dominate to such a degree that his pictures, as well drafted as they obviously are, hit the eye not so much as individual

illustrations, but rather as a continuing narrative stream, deceptively easy to read since the pictures and words are performing precisely the same function. Words and pictures as one. That's the goal of cartooning, folks.

Though recently, one's had much cause to wonder if publishers and cartoonists know this.

"They have no sense of history," grumbles John in his crabby moments, which are frequent. "No sense of history," he charges his colleagues, in plain frustration with a field that seems to pursue one short-sighted suicidal course after another. He remembers, as do I, times that were so much worse — and so much better.

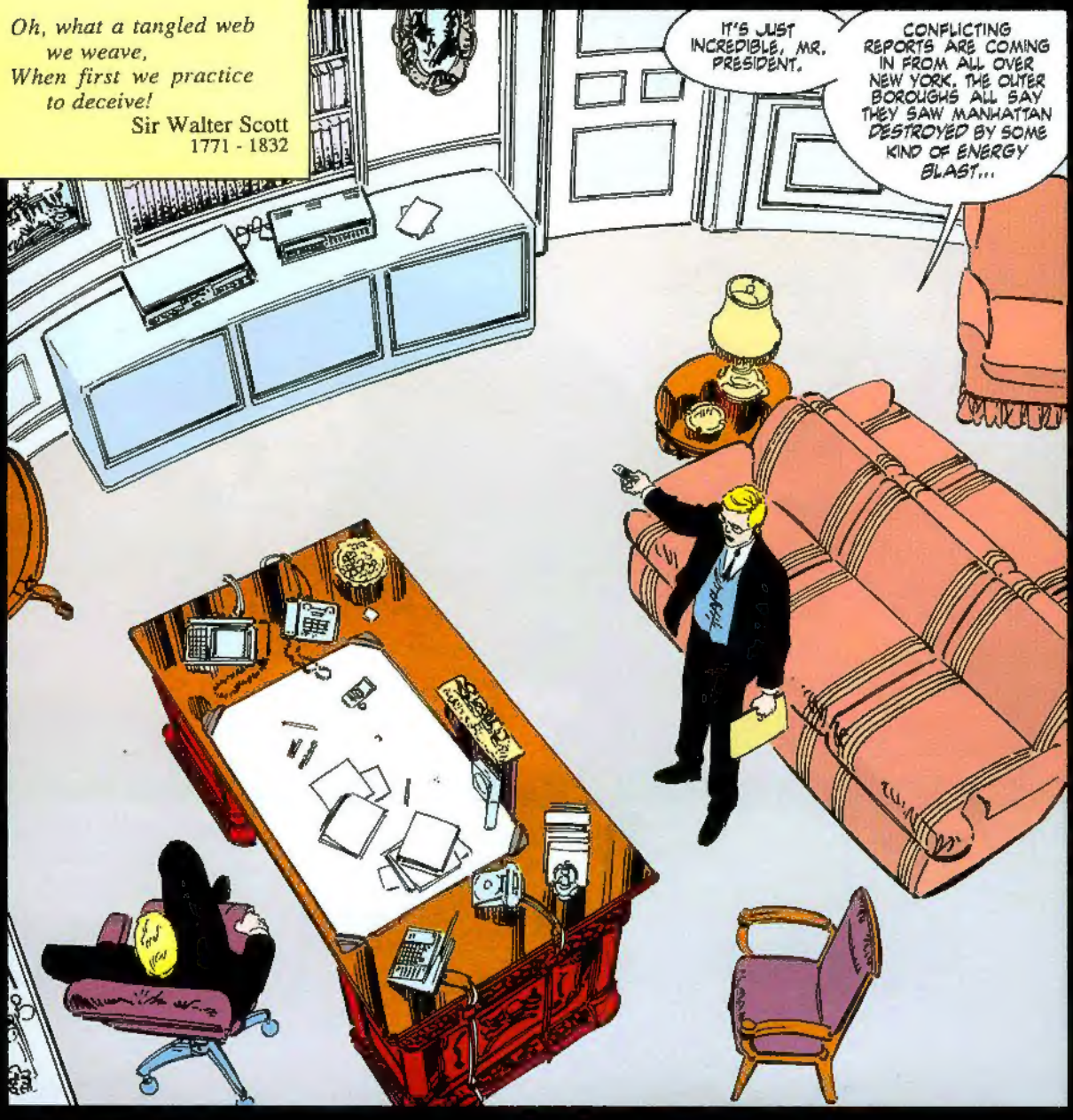
There were no royalties then, no legal authorship to be had, only fixed page rates that scarcely competed with minimum wage. We were paid and treated like cotton-pickers. But there was electricity in the air. Rather than lobby for assignments on "hot books," we'd rummage around for the most neglected and maligned loser of a title we could find — and bring all our craft to breathing life into it. Rather than slavishly pandering to the whims of the audience (or worse, the speculators) and praying some dumb magazine would crown us "hot artists," we enjoyed productive and creative rivalry, everybody out to be the finest, not the "hottest." The highest virtue sought was a great yarn well told, not a flashy marketing plan or a Hollywood option. Yes, we were factory hands, but at least we didn't open up sweatshops of our own, as many of the recently "hot" cartoonists have been so quick to do.

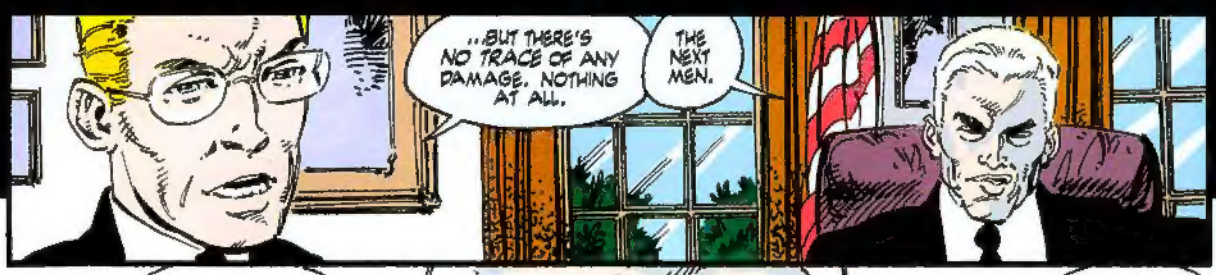
It's sad indeed that better working conditions and higher profits have chased so much of the love from the field. But it'll be back. Once Hollywood and the speculators and all the other parasites have decided there's no more blood to suck from us, we'll rebuild. Comics have seen times even worse than this, and there are better times ahead.

Better times and better comics, crafted by artists, like John, who eschew the trendy and seek the *classic*.

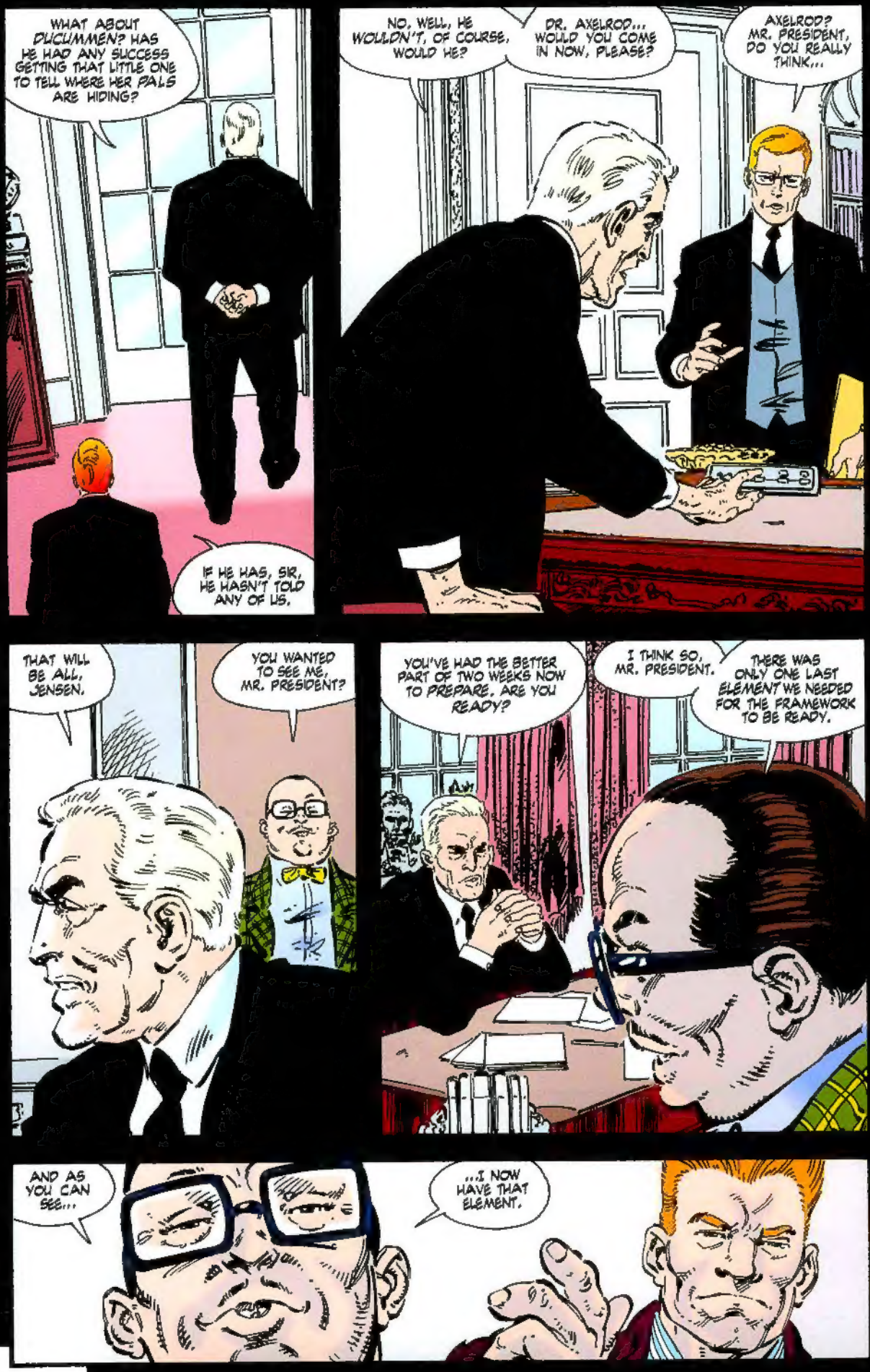
Frank Miller
Charlottesville, VA
1996

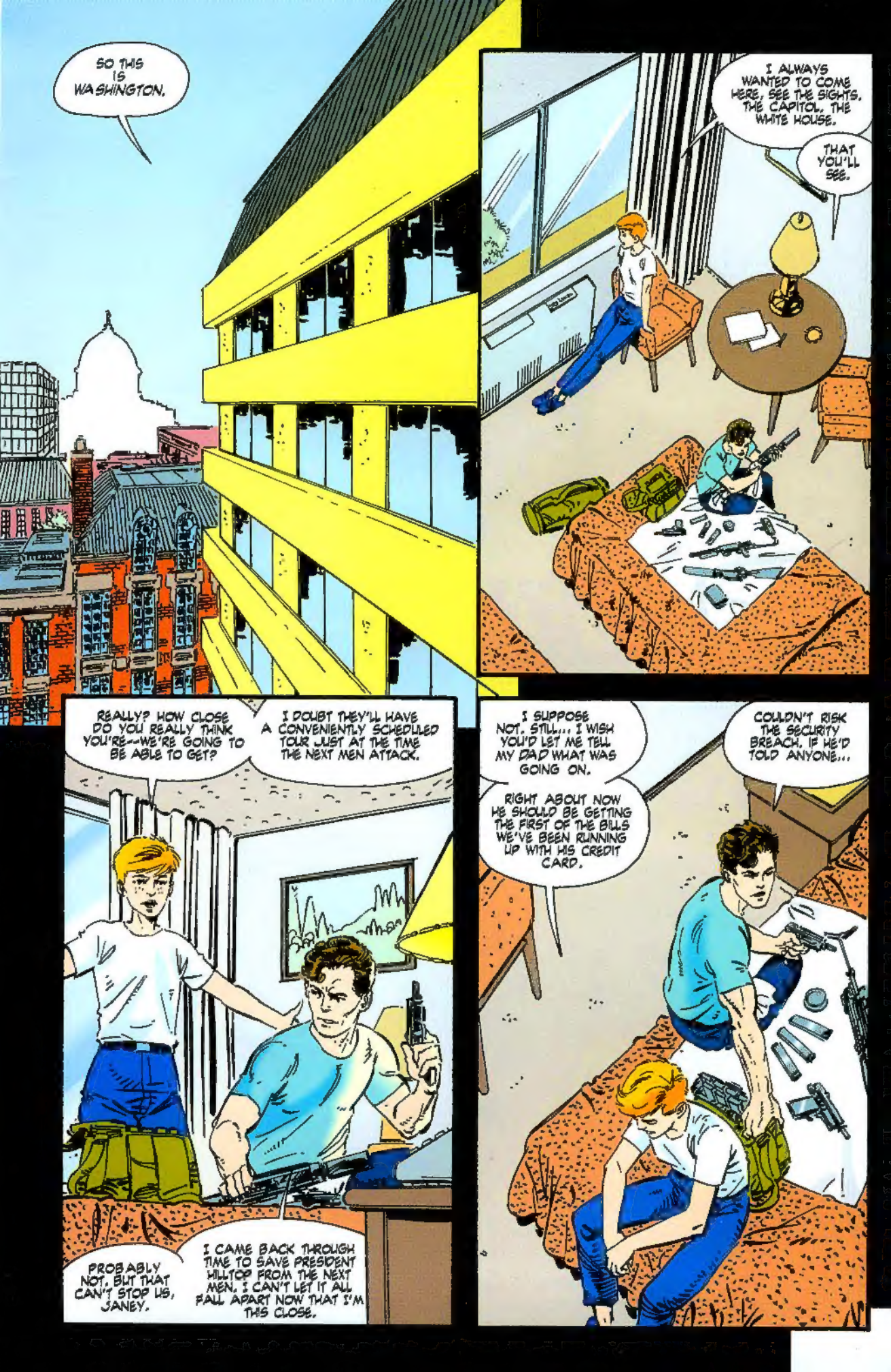
Oh, what a tangled web
we weave,
When first we practice
to deceive!
Sir Walter Scott
1771 - 1832


IT'S JUST INCREDIBLE, MR. PRESIDENT.
CONFLICTING REPORTS ARE COMING IN FROM ALL OVER NEW YORK. THE OUTER BOROUGHS ALL SAY THEY SAW MANHATTAN DESTROYED BY SOME KIND OF ENERGY BLAST...



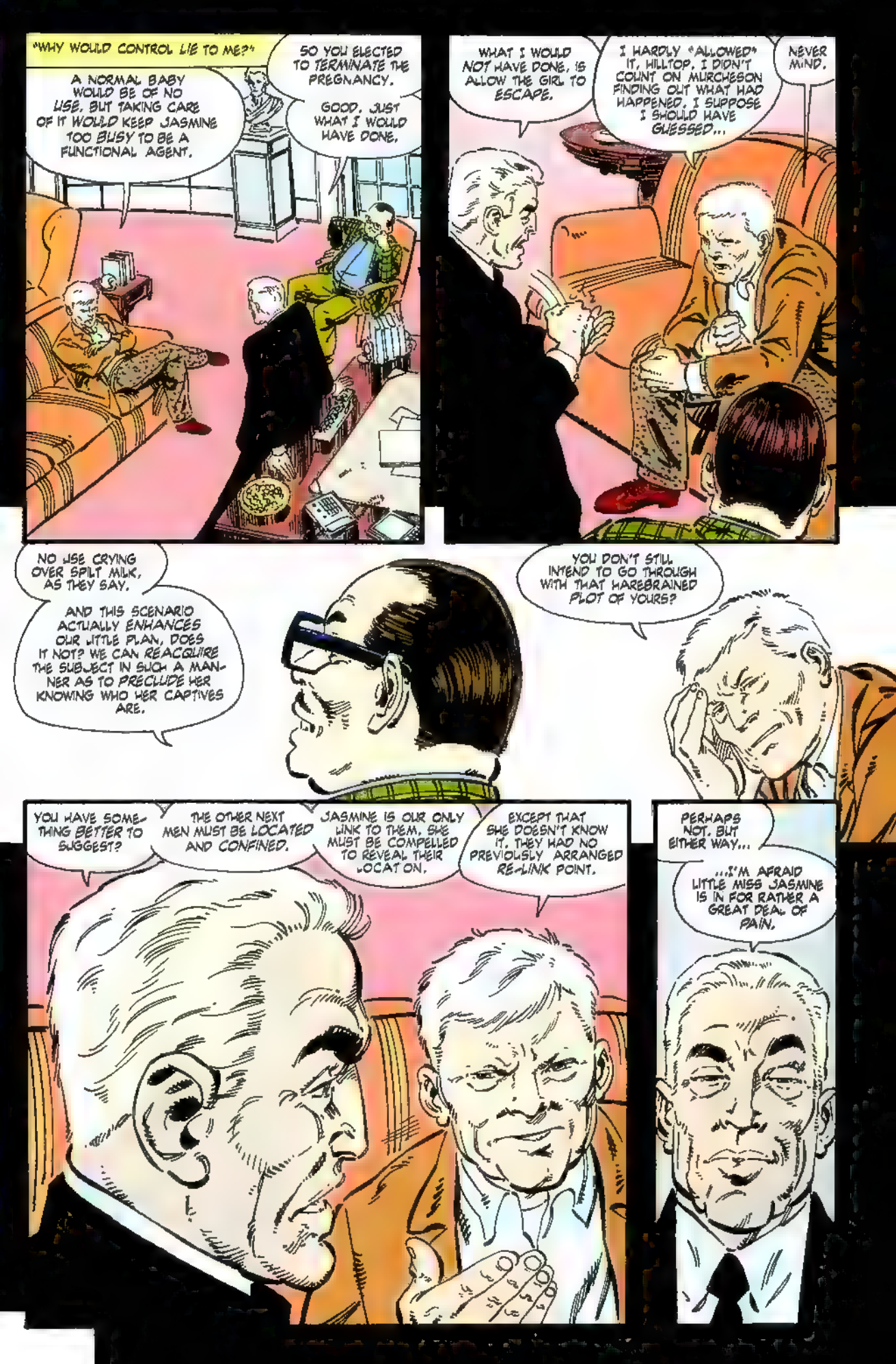
SIR?
THE NEXT MEN, JENSEN. IT HAS TO BE. THOSE FREAKS ARE STILL LOOSE, SOMEWHERE IN THAT CITY.
AND AS LONG AS THEY ARE, NO ONE IS SAFE.


WHAT ABOUT DUCUMMEN? HAS HE HAD ANY SUCCESS GETTING THAT LITTLE ONE TO TELL WHERE HER PALS ARE HIDING?
IF HE HAS, SIR, HE HASN'T TOLD ANY OF US.
NO, WELL, HE WOULDN'T, OF COURSE, WOULD HE?
DR. AXELROD... WOULD YOU COME IN NOW, PLEASE?
AXELROD? MR. PRESIDENT, DO YOU REALLY THINK...
THAT WILL BE ALL, JENSEN.
YOU WANTED TO SEE ME, MR. PRESIDENT?
YOU'VE HAD THE BETTER PART OF TWO WEEKS NOW TO PREPARE. ARE YOU READY?
I THINK SO, MR. PRESIDENT.
THERE WAS ONLY ONE LAST ELEMENT WE NEEDED FOR THE FRAMEWORK TO BE READY.
AND AS YOU CAN SEE...
...I NOW HAVE THAT ELEMENT.


SO THIS IS WASHINGTON.
I ALWAYS WANTED TO COME HERE, SEE THE SIGHTS, THE CAPITOL, THE WHITE HOUSE.
THAT YOU'LL SEE.
REALLY? HOW CLOSE DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU'RE--WE'RE GOING TO BE ABLE TO GET?
I DOUBT THEY'LL HAVE A CONVENIENTLY SCHEDULED TOUR JUST AT THE TIME THE NEXT MEN ATTACK.
PROBABLY NOT. BUT THAT CAN'T STOP US, JANEY.
I CAME BACK THROUGH TIME TO SAVE PRESIDENT HILLTOP FROM THE NEXT MEN. I CAN'T LET IT ALL FALL APART NOW THAT I'M THIS CLOSE.
I SUPPOSE NOT. STILL... I WISH YOU'D LET ME TELL MY *DAD* WHAT WAS GOING ON.
RIGHT ABOUT NOW HE SHOULD BE GETTING THE FIRST OF THE BILLS WE'VE BEEN RUNNING UP WITH HIS CREDIT CARD.
COULDN'T RISK THE SECURITY BREACH. IF HE'D TOLD ANYONE...

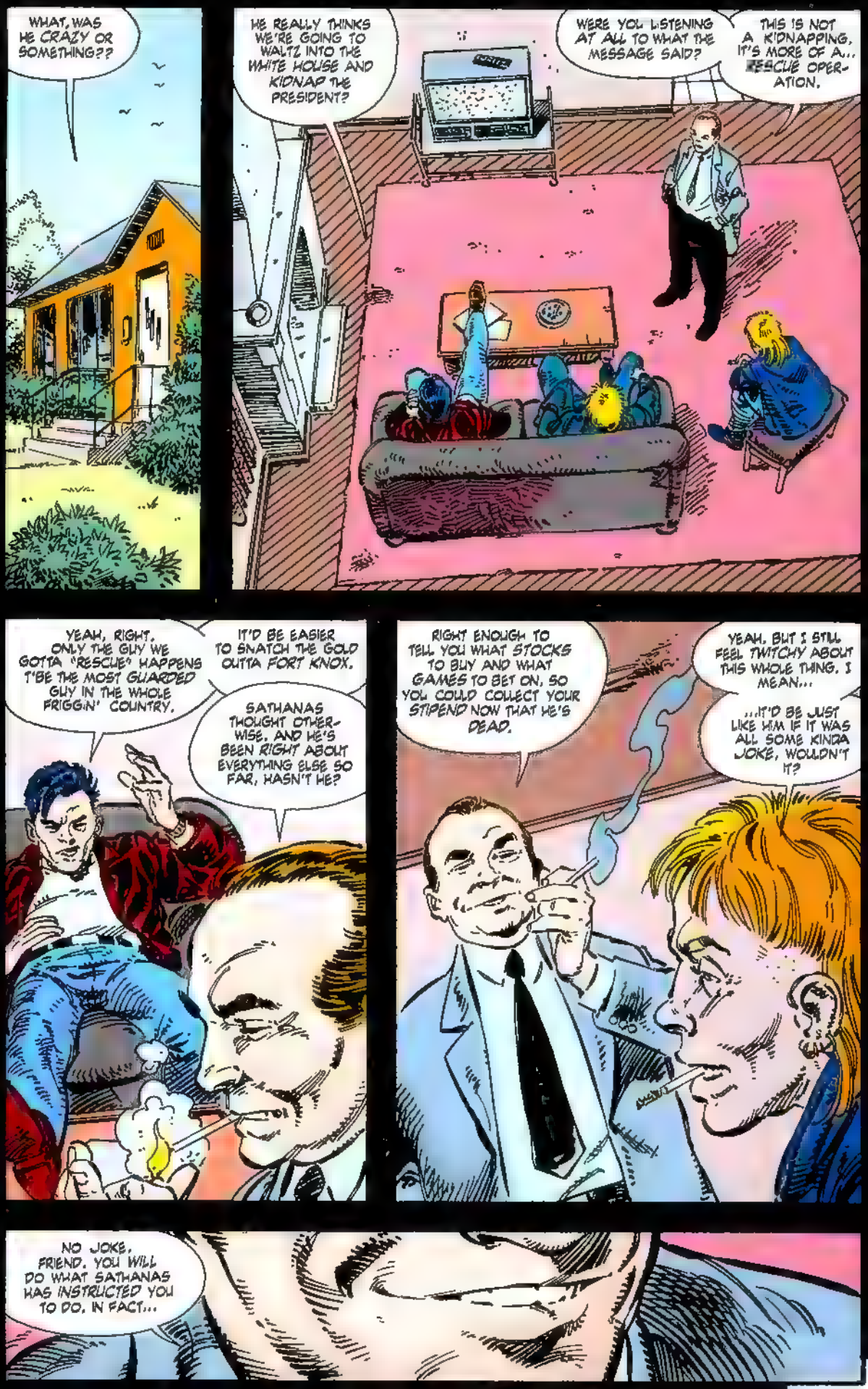
I KNOW, I KNOW. WE'VE BEEN THROUGH ALL THIS BEFORE. STILL...
"...I COULD HAVE DONE WITH A WHOLE LOT LESS OF THIS CLOAK-AND-DAGGER STUFF..."
GOOD MORNING, JASMINE. AND HOW ARE YOU...
OH!
...MUFL...!

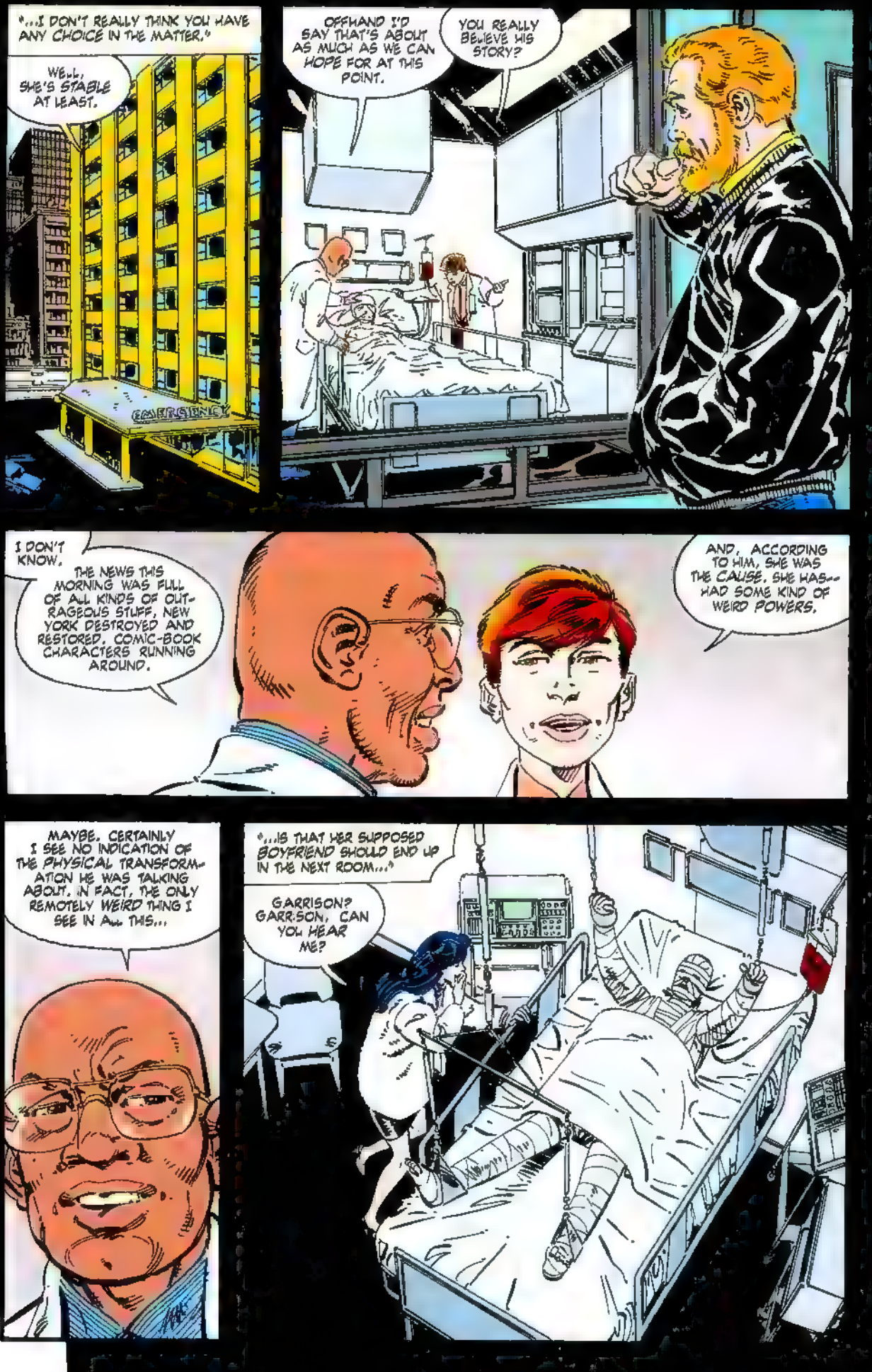
I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS, TONY.
Rapid Prints
I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO COME WITH YOU AFTER YOU USED THE ORDER COMPULSION ON ME...
...BUT I DON'T KNOW WHY THIS IS HAPPENING.
CONTROL TOLD YOU THE BABY YOU WERE CARRYING WAS SOME KIND OF MONSTER, DIDN'T HE?
THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER ALL ROUND IF YOU ABORTED THE FETUS--EVEN AT FIVE MONTHS.
YES...
WELL, HE LIED. I CHECKED THE MEDICAL FILES. I'M THE ONLY OTHER PERSON BESIDES CONTROL WHO KNOWS YOUR FULL NAME, SO I WAS ABLE TO GET YOUR RECORDS EASILY.
AND YOUR BABY WAS NORMAL, JAZZ. A PERFECTLY NORMAL, PERFECTLY HEALTHY LITTLE GIRL.
JUST LIKE THE ONE I LOST. THE ONE THAT WAS THE LAST CHANCE I'D EVER HAVE OF A BABY OF MY OWN.
BUT... BUT WHY?


"WHY WOULD CONTROL LIE TO ME?"
A NORMAL BABY WOULD BE OF NO USE. BUT TAKING CARE OF IT WOULD KEEP JASMINE TOO BUSY TO BE A FUNCTIONAL AGENT.
SO YOU ELECTED TO TERMINATE THE PREGNANCY.
GOOD. JUST WHAT I WOULD HAVE DONE.
WHAT I WOULD NOT HAVE DONE, IS ALLOW THE GIRL TO ESCAPE.
I HARDLY "ALLOWED" IT, HILLTOP. I DIDN'T COUNT ON MURCHESON FINDING OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED. I SUPPOSE I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED...
NEVER MIND.
NO USE CRYING OVER SPILT MILK, AS THEY SAY.
AND THIS SCENARIO ACTUALLY ENHANCES OUR LITTLE PLAN, DOES IT NOT? WE CAN REACQUIRE THE SUBJECT IN SUCH A MANNER AS TO PRECLUDE HER KNOWING WHO HER CAPTIVES ARE.
YOU DON'T STILL INTEND TO GO THROUGH WITH THAT HAREBRAINED PLOT OF YOURS?
YOU HAVE SOMETHING BETTER TO SUGGEST?
THE OTHER NEXT MEN MUST BE LOCATED AND CONFINED.
JASMINE IS OUR ONLY LINK TO THEM. SHE MUST BE COMPELLED TO REVEAL THEIR LOCATION.
EXCEPT THAT SHE DOESN'T KNOW IT. THEY HAD NO PREVIOUSLY ARRANGED RE-LINK POINT.
PERHAPS NOT. BUT EITHER WAY...
...I'M AFRAID LITTLE MISS JASMINE IS IN FOR RATHER A GREAT DEAL OF PAIN.

HOW IS SHE THIS MORNING?
LARGELY UNCHANGED. HER DEMENTIA CONTINUES.
SHE STILL BELIEVES SHE WAS "ATTACKED" BY THE GHOST OF HER DEAD DAUGHTER SOMEHOW INSIDE HER OWN HEAD?
YES. A MOST COMPLEX PSYCHOSIS. I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO SHAKE SO MUCH AS A SINGLE DETAIL OF IT.
WHAT ABOUT THE LITTLE GIRL? HER REAL DAUGHTER?
OH, SHE'S FINE. SHE COMPLAINS SOMETIMES ABOUT NOT HAVING ANY OTHER CHILDREN TO PLAY WITH...
...BUT OTHER THAN THAT HER TEMPERAMENT AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEEM PERFECTLY IN LINE WITH WHAT YOU MIGHT EXPECT FROM HER UPBRINGING...

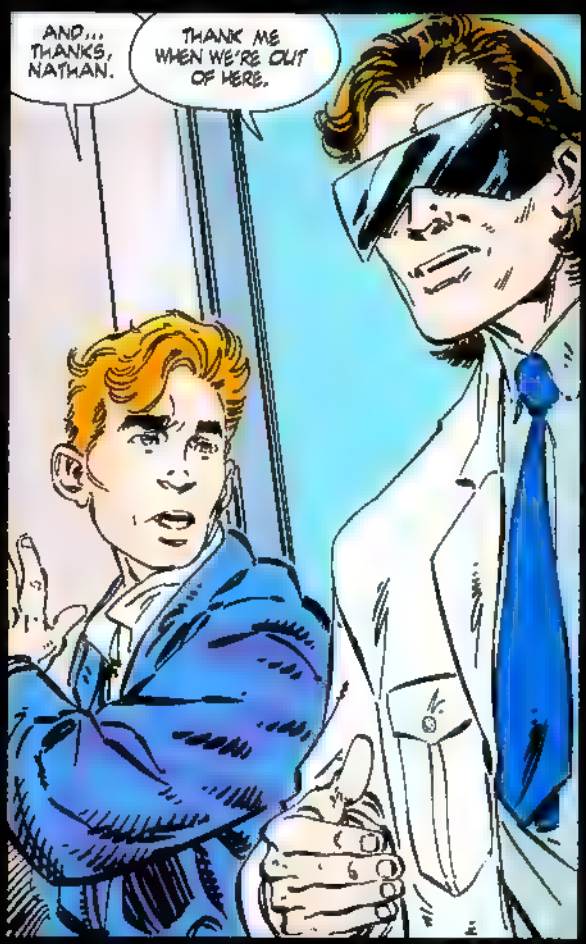
IS THIS SAFE, TONY?
WE'RE NOT GOING TO BE HERE LONG, JAZZ. I'M GAMBLING THAT THE LAST PLACE ANYONE WOULD THINK TO LOOK FOR US IS MY APARTMENT.
THIS IS VERY NICE. MORE... FEMININE THAN I WOULD HAVE EXPECTED.
WAS THIS YOUR HUSBAND?
YES, JOE. HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT HIM?
OH, CONTROL TOLD US ALL ABOUT YOU WHILE YOU WERE IN THAT COMA AFTER OUR ADVENTURE IN RUSSIA.
DID HE, INDEED?
WELL... COME ON. I'VE GOT ALL THE STUFF I NEED TO GET US STARTED.
"TIME WE WERE OUT OF HERE."
THERE IT IS.
INFORM CONTROL WE HAVE A SIGNAL.

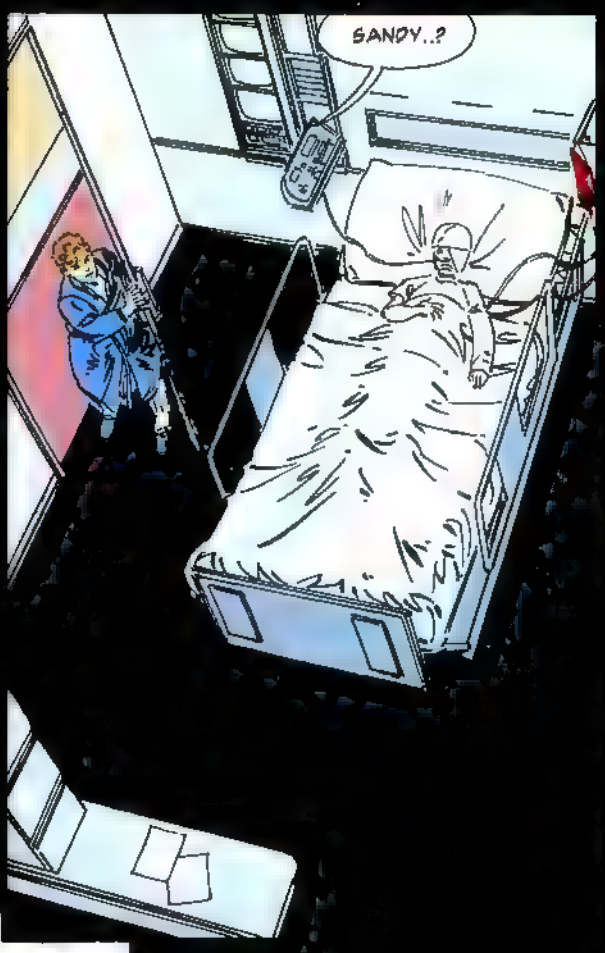

WHAT, WAS HE CRAZY OR SOMETHING??
HE REALLY THINKS WE'RE GOING TO WALTZ INTO THE WHITE HOUSE AND KIDNAP THE PRESIDENT?
WERE YOU LISTENING AT ALL TO WHAT THE MESSAGE SAID?
THIS IS NOT A KIDNAPPING, IT'S MORE OF A... RESCUE OPERATION.
YEAH, RIGHT. ONLY THE GUY WE GOTTA "RESCUE" HAPPENS T'BE THE MOST GUARDED GUY IN THE WHOLE FRIGGIN' COUNTRY.
IT'D BE EASIER TO SNATCH THE GOLD OUTTA FORT KNOX.
SATHANAS THOUGHT OTHERWISE, AND HE'S BEEN RIGHT ABOUT EVERYTHING ELSE SO FAR, HASN'T HE?
RIGHT ENOUGH TO TELL YOU WHAT STOCKS TO BUY AND WHAT GAMES TO BET ON, SO YOU COULD COLLECT YOUR STIPEND NOW THAT HE'S DEAD.
YEAH, BUT I STILL FEEL TWITCHY ABOUT THIS WHOLE THING. I MEAN...
...IT'D BE JUST LIKE HIM IF IT WAS ALL SOME KINDA JOKE, WOULDN'T IT?
NO JOKE, FRIEND. YOU WILL DO WHAT SATHANAS HAS INSTRUCTED YOU TO DO. IN FACT...


"...I DON'T REALLY THINK YOU HAVE ANY CHOICE IN THE MATTER."
WELL, SHE'S STABLE AT LEAST.
EMERGENCY
OFFHAND I'D SAY THAT'S ABOUT AS MUCH AS WE CAN HOPE FOR AT THIS POINT.
YOU REALLY BELIEVE HIS STORY?
I DON'T KNOW.
THE NEWS THIS MORNING WAS FULL OF ALL KINDS OF OUTRAGEOUS STUFF, NEW YORK DESTROYED AND RESTORED, COMIC-BOOK CHARACTERS RUNNING AROUND.
AND, ACCORDING TO HIM, SHE WAS THE CAUSE. SHE HAS... HAD SOME KIND OF WEIRD POWERS.
MAYBE. CERTAINLY I SEE NO INDICATION OF THE PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION HE WAS TALKING ABOUT. IN FACT, THE ONLY REMOTELY WEIRD THING I SEE IN ALL THIS...
"...IS THAT HER SUPPOSED BOYFRIEND SHOULD END UP IN THE NEXT ROOM..."
GARRISON? GARRISON, CAN YOU HEAR ME?

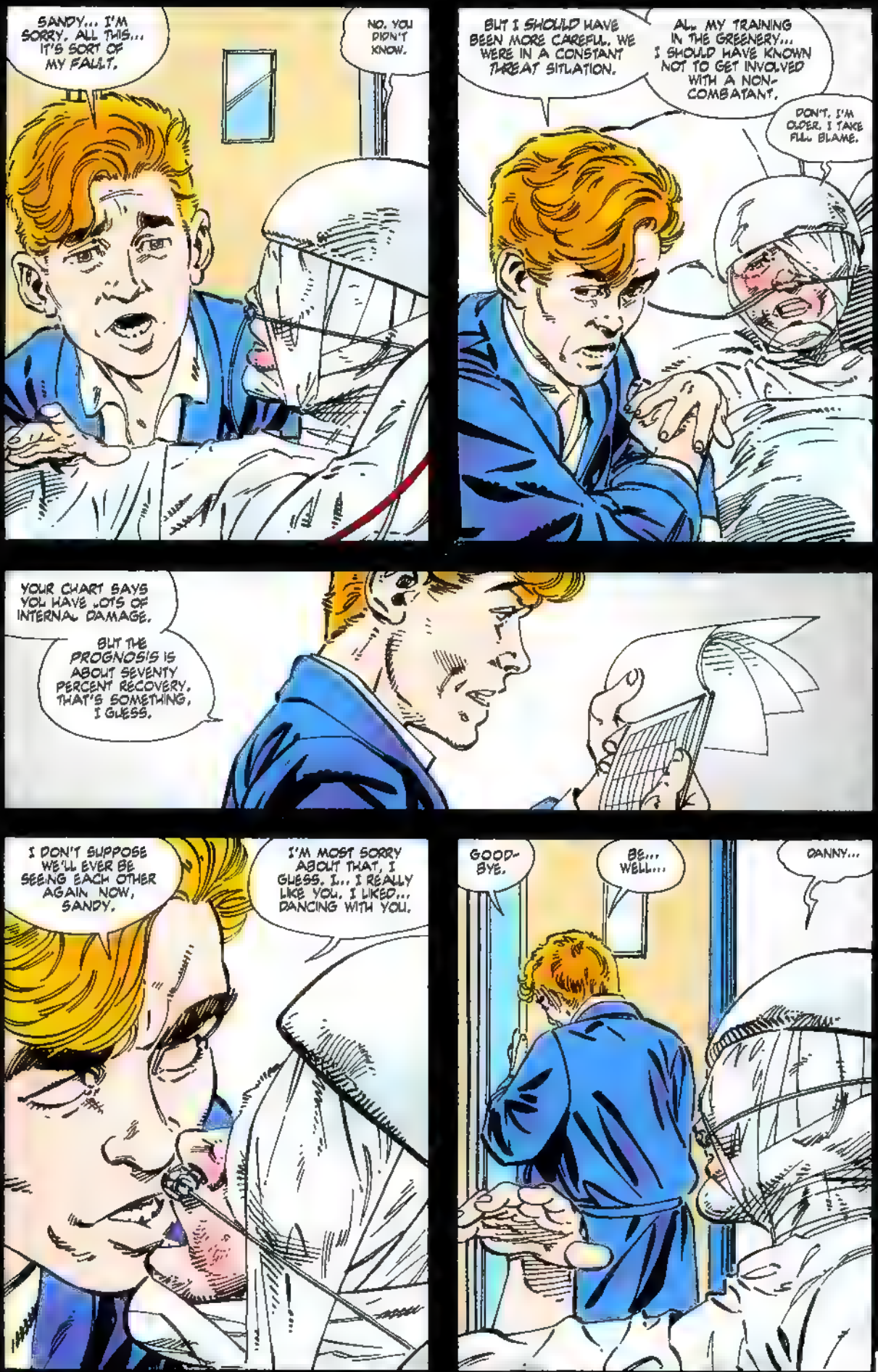
I'M LEAVING TOWN, GARRISON. I'VE GOT NOWHERE TO STAY SINCE MY APARTMENT GOT BURNED, Y'KNOW?
AND... ANYWAY, THIS IS ALL TOO WEIRD FOR ME. THE WAY EVERYTHING BLEW UP BUT I WASN'T HURT.
I'M GOING DOWN TO DALLAS TO STAY WITH MY EX. HE AND I ARE STILL GOOD BUDDIES, Y'KNOW?
HE SOMETIMES STAYS WITH ME WHEN HE'S IN NEW YORK, AND...
GOOD-BYE, GARRISON.

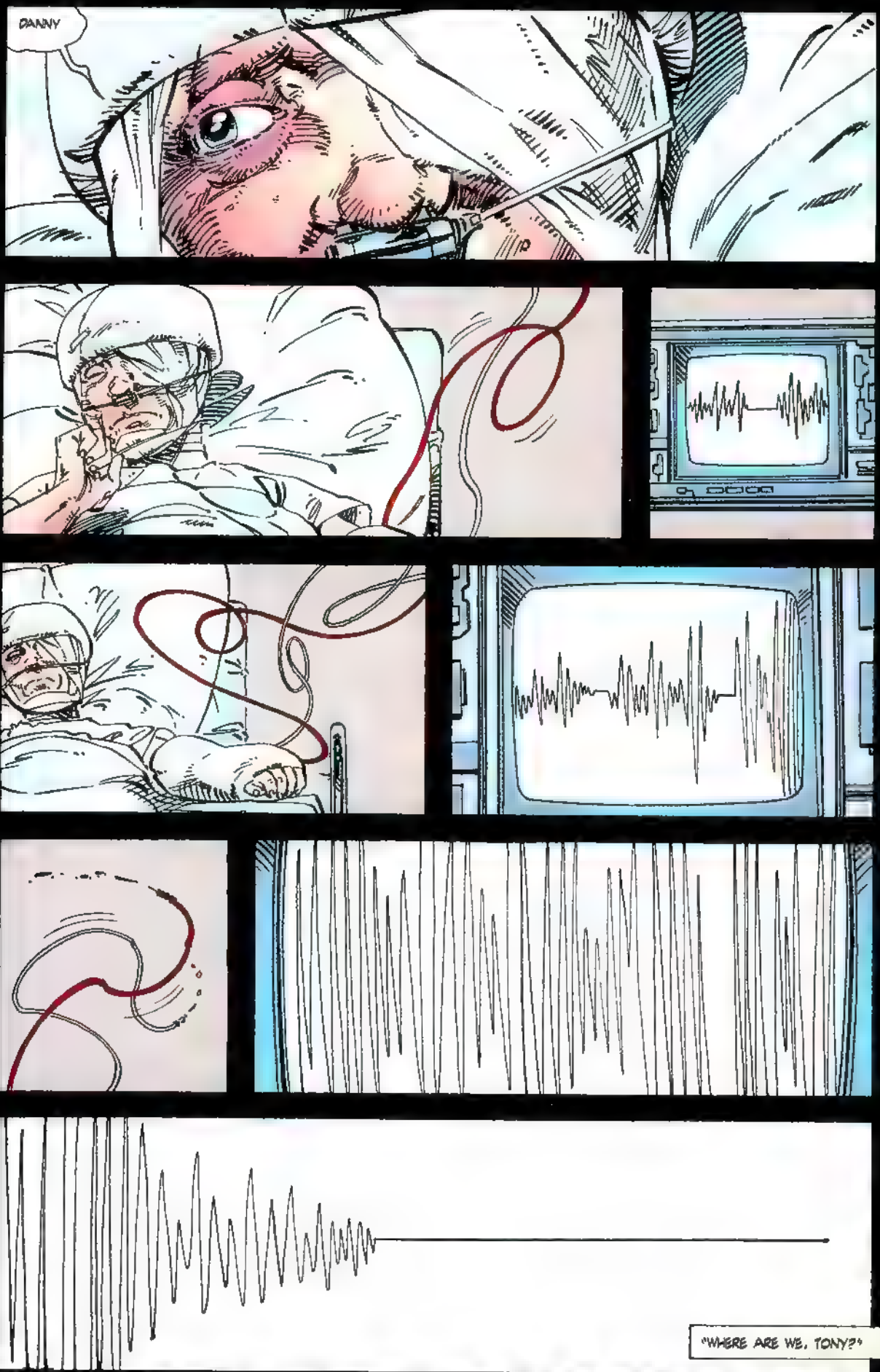
"I HOPE YOU GET BETTER SOON, Y'KNOW..?"
THIS IS IT.
OKAY, DANNY. IN YOU GO. TWO MINUTES.
RIGHT.

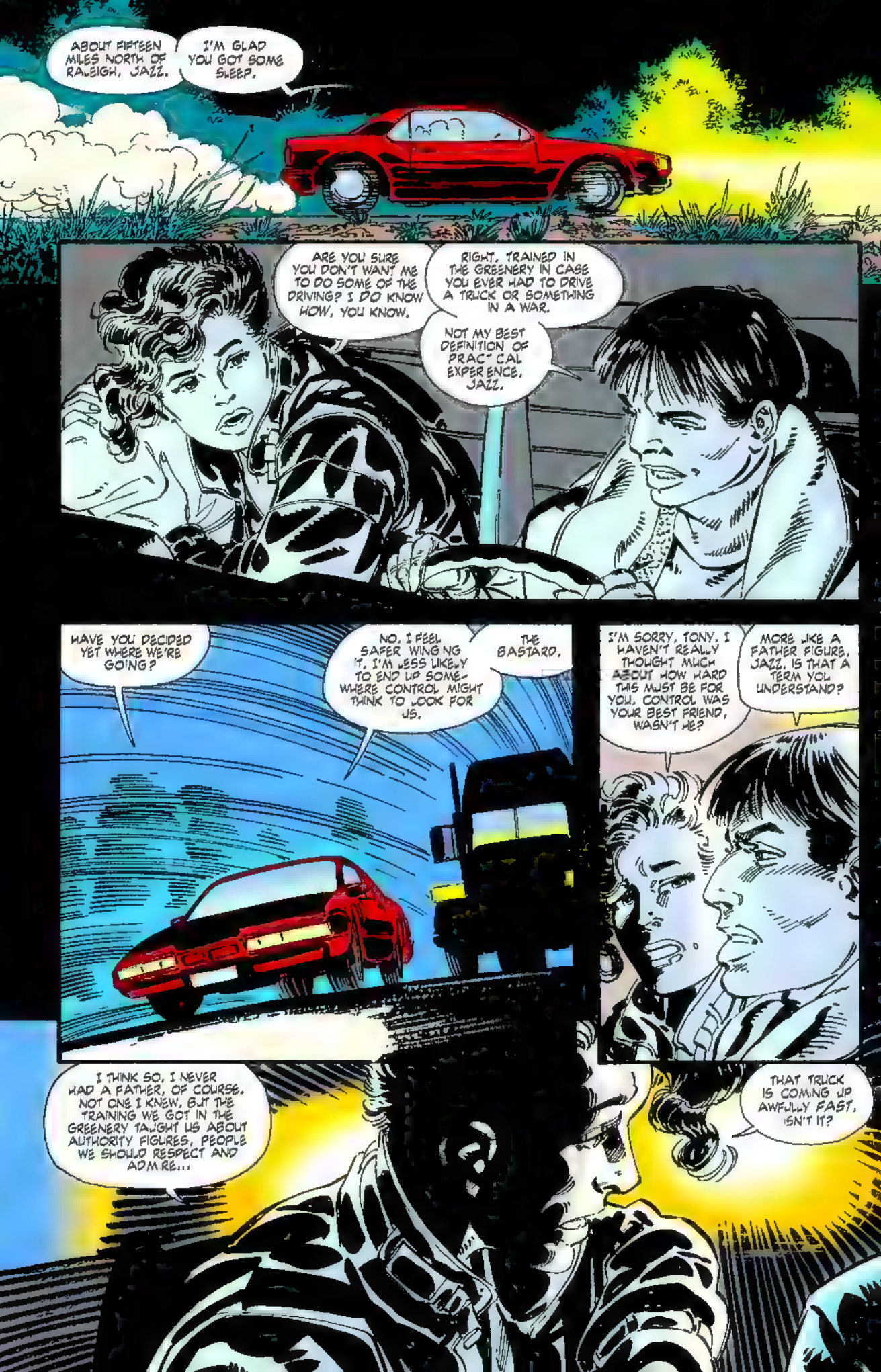

AND... THANKS, NATHAN.
THANK ME WHEN WE'RE OUT OF HERE.


SANDY..?

DANNY..?


SANDY... I'M SORRY. ALL THIS... IT'S SORT OF MY FAULT.
NO. YOU DIDN'T KNOW.
BUT I SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE CAREFUL. WE WERE IN A CONSTANT THREAT SITUATION.
AL. MY TRAINING IN THE GREENERY... I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN NOT TO GET INVOLVED WITH A NON-COMBATANT.
DON'T. I'M OLDER. I TAKE FULL BLAME.
YOUR CHART SAYS YOU HAVE LOTS OF INTERNAL DAMAGE.
BUT THE PROGNOSIS IS ABOUT SEVENTY PERCENT RECOVERY. THAT'S SOMETHING, I GUESS.
I DON'T SUPPOSE WE'LL EVER BE SEEING EACH OTHER AGAIN NOW, SANDY.
I'M MOST SORRY ABOUT THAT, I GUESS. I... I REALLY LIKE YOU. I LIKED... DANCING WITH YOU.
GOOD-BYE.
BE... WELL...
DANNY...


DANNY
"WHERE ARE WE, TONY?"


ABOUT FIFTEEN MILES NORTH OF RALEIGH, JAZZ.
I'M GLAD YOU GOT SOME SLEEP.
ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT ME TO DO SOME OF THE DRIVING? I DO KNOW HOW, YOU KNOW.
RIGHT. TRAINED IN THE GREENERY IN CASE YOU EVER HAD TO DRIVE A TRUCK OR SOMETHING IN A WAR.
NOT MY BEST DEFINITION OF PRAC" CAL EXPER ENCE, JAZZ.
HAVE YOU DECIDED YET WHERE WE'RE GOING?
NO. I FEEL SAFER WING NG IT. I'M LESS LIKELY TO END UP SOME- WHERE CONTROL MIGHT THINK TO LOOK FOR US.
THE BASTARD.
I'M SORRY, TONY. I HAVEN'T REALLY THOUGHT MUCH ABOUT HOW HARD THIS MUST BE FOR YOU. CONTROL WAS YOUR BEST FRIEND, WASN'T HE?
MORE LIKE A FATHER FIGURE, JAZZ. IS THAT A TERM YOU UNDERSTAND?
I THINK SO. I NEVER HAD A FATHER, OF COURSE. NOT ONE I KNEW. BUT THE TRAINING WE GOT IN THE GREENERY TAUGHT US ABOUT AUTHORITY FIGURES, PEOPLE WE SHOULD RESPECT AND ADMIRE...
THAT TRUCK IS COMING UP AWFULLY FAST, ISN'T IT?

SHIT!

WAKE UP.
WAKE UP!
OH!!
WH-WHERE AM I?
WHERE'S TONY?
THAT IS SOMETHING YOU DO NOT NEED TO KNOW, MY DEAR.

WHAT YOU DO NEED TO KNOW, IS THAT WE ARE QUITE RUTHLESS, AND THAT YOU HAVE INFORMATION WE WANT.
INFORM-ATION?

YES. THE LOCATION OF YOUR FOUR LITTLE FRIENDS, THE REST OF THE NEXT MEN.
WHAT WAS YOUR PREVIOUSLY ARRANGED RE-LINK POINT?
..?
WE... WE DIDN'T HAVE ONE. THERE WAS NO REASON TO SET ONE UP--AT LEAST, WE DIDN'T THINK THERE WAS.

NO, NO. NOT NEARLY GOOD ENOUGH, I'M AFRAID.
I THINK IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO ALLOW BENNY HERE TO SPEND A LITTLE TIME... TALKING TO YOU.

BUT THAT'S THE TRUTH! I DON'T KNOW WHERE THE OTHERS ARE!
WE SHALL SEE.

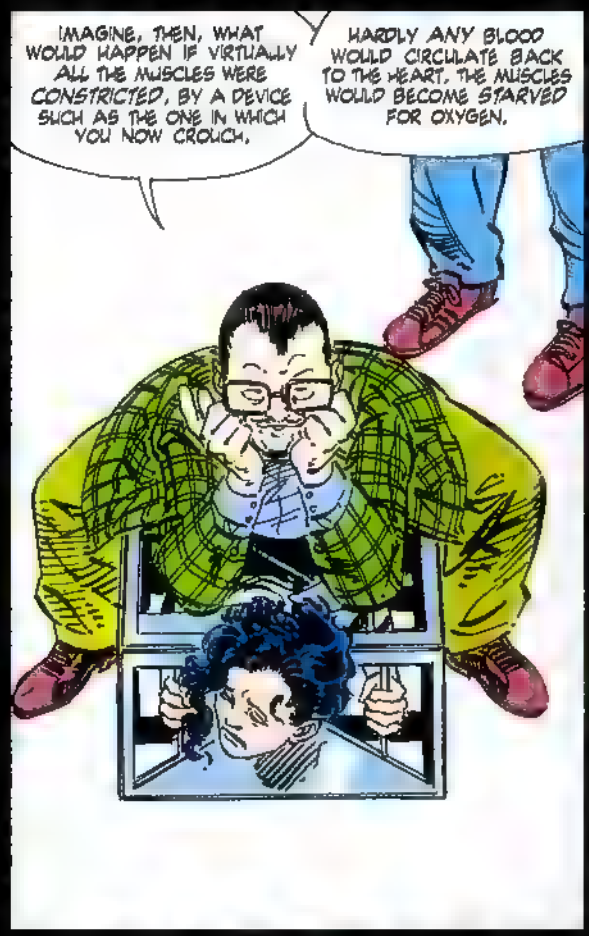
YOU'RE SURE THAT BRUTE KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING? ONE BRUISE...
BENNY IS QUITE EXPERT. I TRAINED HIM MYSELF.
WE'LL ALLOW HIM ABOUT TEN MINUTES, THEN I'LL BRING IN THE WOMB.
I WISH YOU'D STOP CALLING THE DAMN THING THAT.
CORRECT HISTORICAL IDIOM, MR. PRESIDENT. CORRECT NAME FOR A MOST INGENIOUS DEVICE.
OUR ANCESTORS WERE SO WONDERFULLY SKILLED IN THE ART OF PAIN.
COFFEE?
NO.
TSK TSK. I SHOULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED YOU TO SHOW A WEAK STOMACH AT A MOMENT LIKE THIS,
THIS IS, AFTER ALL, YOUR PLAN, ISN'T IT?
YES, IT'S MY PLAN. IT'S ALL MY PLAN.
I JUST...
IN ALL HONESTY, AXELROD, I DID NOT EXPECT TO FIND MYSELF QUITE SO... AROUSED BY THIS JASMINE CREATURE.
LOOK AT HER. SO SMOOTH. SO FIRM.

"LIKE A YOUNG BOY..."
...PLEASE...
...I DON'T KNOW ANY-THING...
ALL RIGHT, BENNY. YOU CAN STOP NOW.
...YOU BELIEVE ME..?
OH, NOT AT ALL, CHILD. NOT AT ALL.
WE HAVE SIMPLY ELECTED TO TRY A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT APPROACH.
THIS MARVELOUS CONTRAPTION IS CALLED "THE DEVIL'S WOMB." IT OPERATES ON A REMARK-ABLY SIMPLE PRINCIPLE.
ARE YOU AWARE, I WONDER, OF HOW SOLDIERS FORCED TO STAND AT ATTENTION FOR LONG PERIODS WILL SOMETIMES FAINT DEAD AWAY?
OR OF HOW A PERSON'S FEET WILL SWELL WHEN THEY SIT IN AN AIRPLANE OR A CAR FOR A LONG TIME?

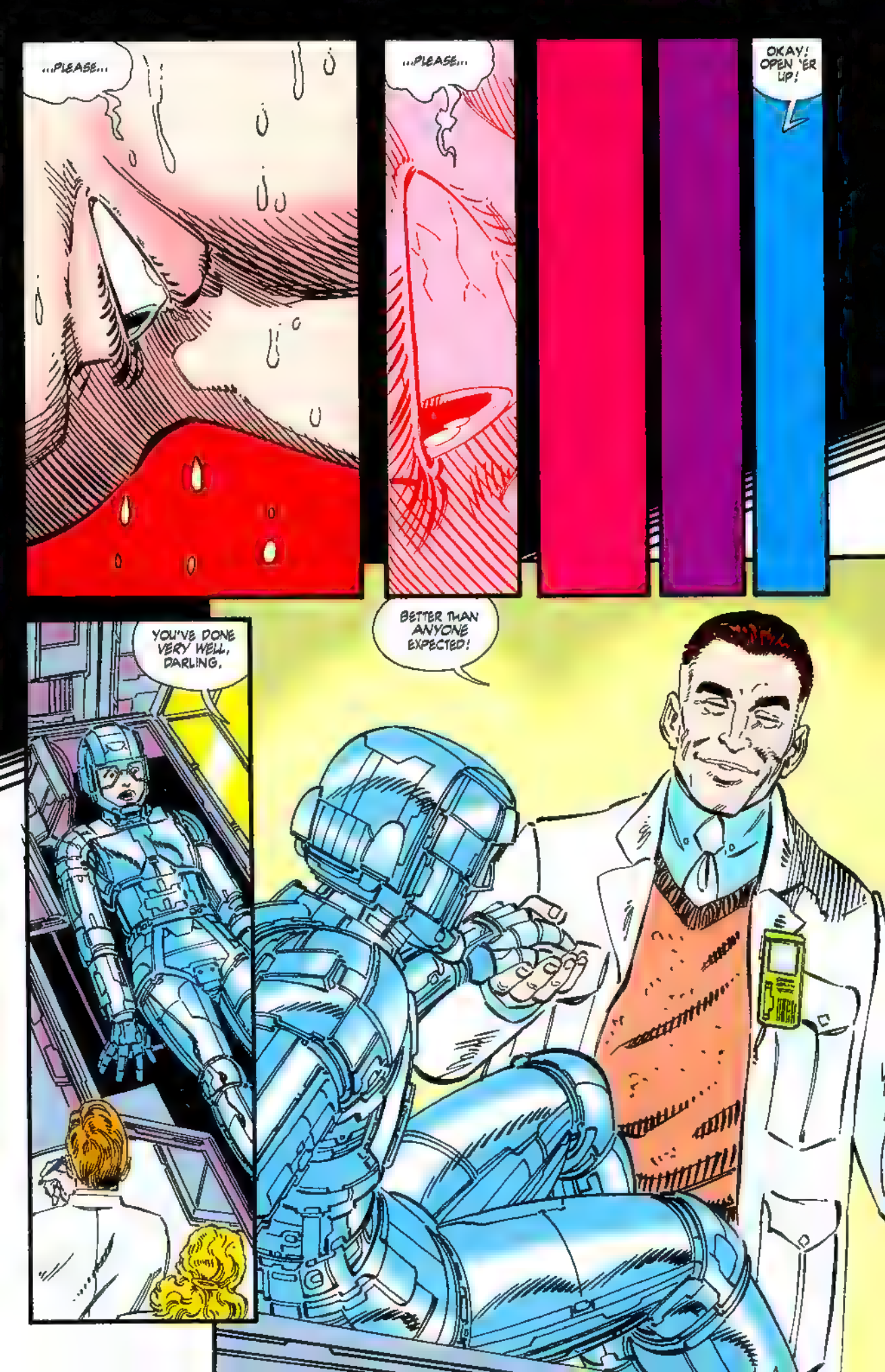
THERE IS A SIMPLE MEDICAL REASON FOR THIS.
THE HEART IS A CLEVER LITTLE ORGAN, BUT IT CAN ONLY PUSH THE BLOOD, IT CANNOT PULL IT.

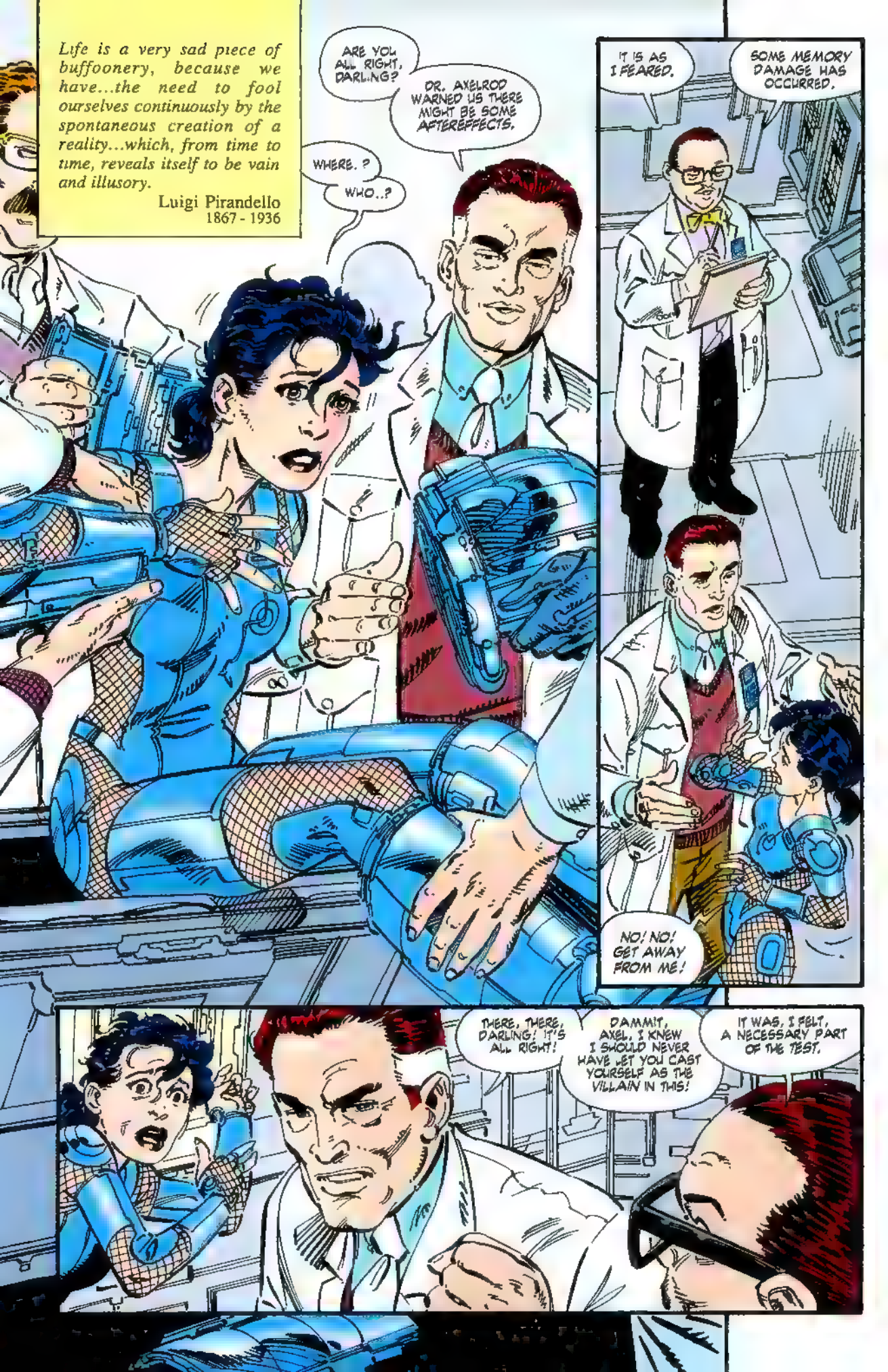
MOTHER NATURE'S SOLUTION TO THIS IS A UNIQUE STRUCTURE OF TRAP DOORS WITHIN THE VEINS, THE VESSELS WHICH RETURN BLOOD TO THE HEART.
AS THE MUSCLES WORK, THE VEINS ARE SQUEEZED, AND THE BLOOD MOVES ALONG THEM, PREVENTED FROM SLIPPING BACK BY THOSE LITTLE DOORS.

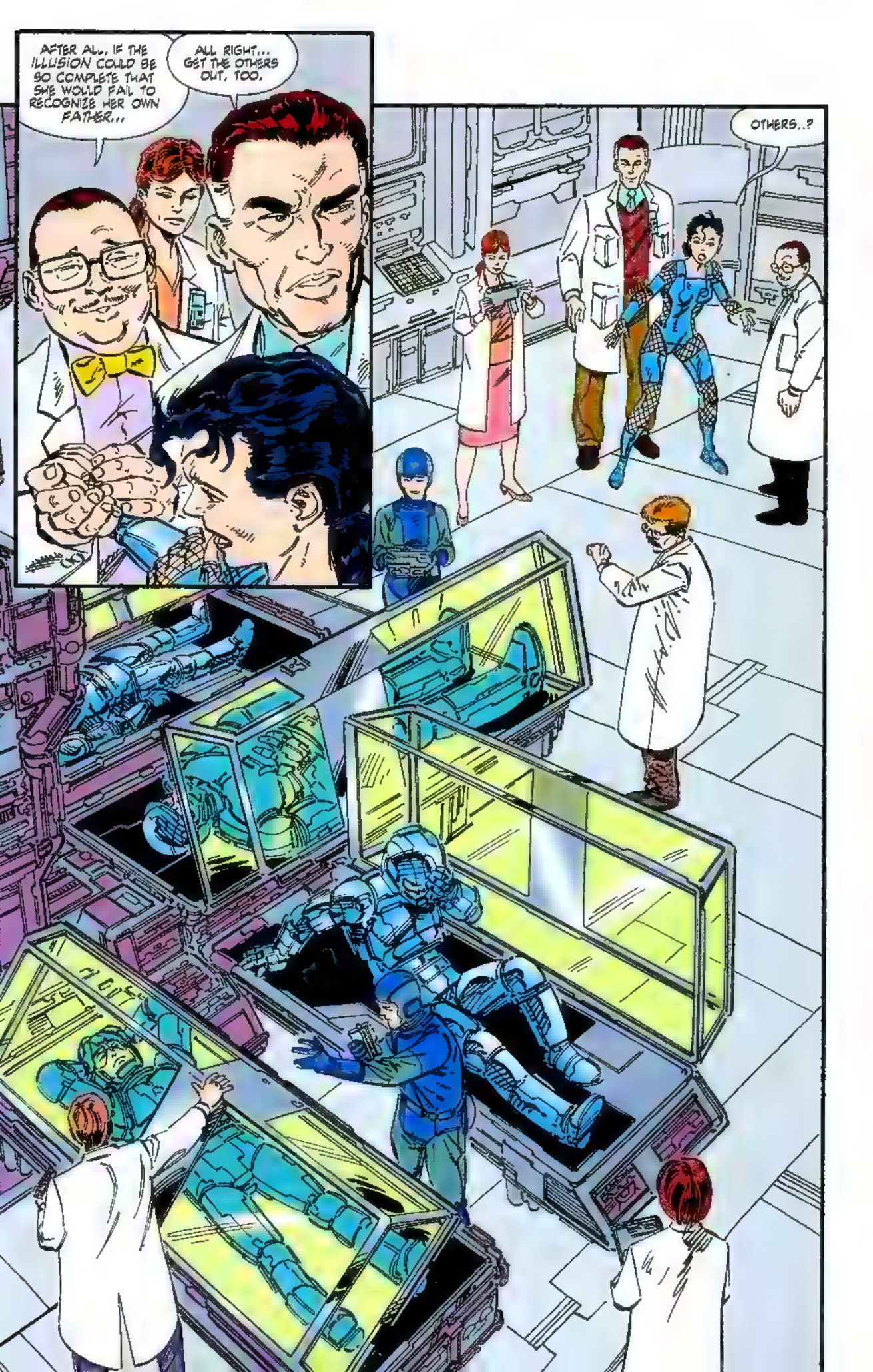
OF COURSE, IF A BODY IS FORCED TO REMAIN AT REST--AT ATTENTION, OR SITTING--THE MUSCLES DO NOT DO THEIR JOB...
...AND THE BLOOD CANNOT FLOW BACK TO THE HEART QUITE SO EFFICIENTLY AS INTENDED.

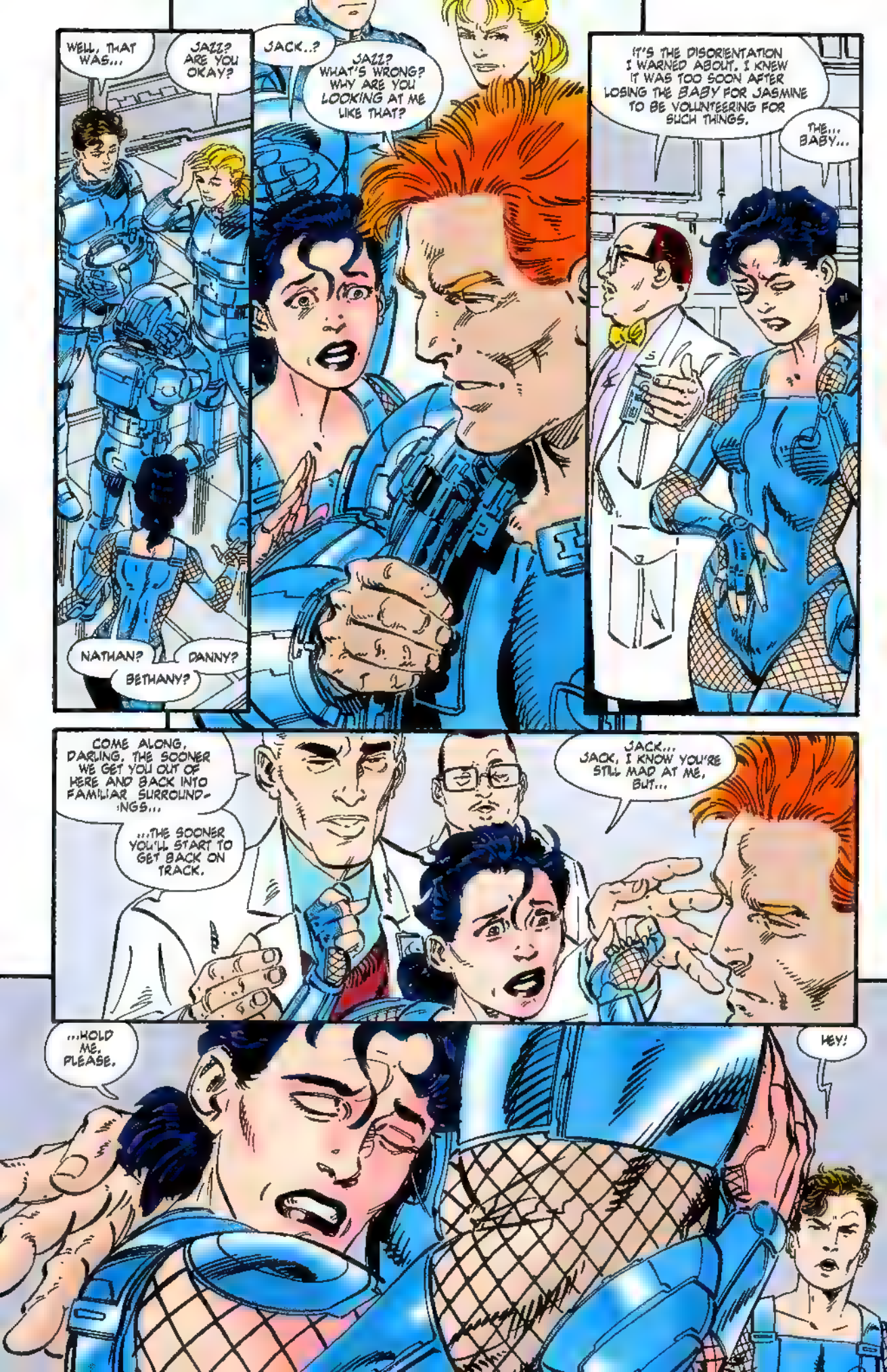

IMAGINE, THEN, WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF VIRTUALLY ALL THE MUSCLES WERE CONSTRICTED, BY A DEVICE SUCH AS THE ONE IN WHICH YOU NOW CROUCH.
HARDLY ANY BLOOD WOULD CIRCULATE BACK TO THE HEART. THE MUSCLES WOULD BECOME STARVED FOR OXYGEN.

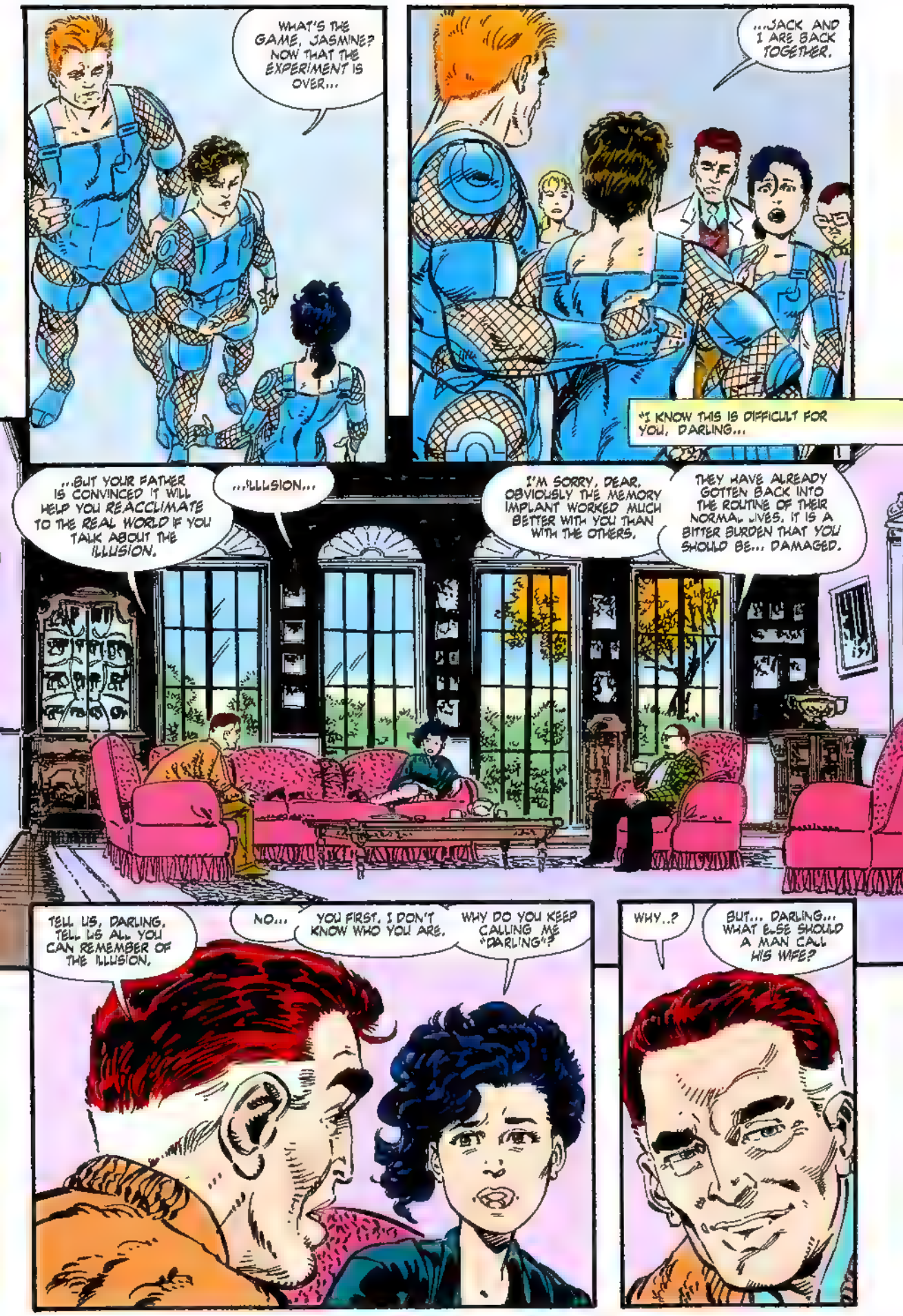
EVENTUALLY THE SUBJECT WOULD PASS OUT AND, I SUPPOSE, POSSIBLY EVEN DIE.
BEFORE THAT, HOWEVER, I WOULD IMAGINE THAT THE PAIN WOULD BECOME...
...QUITE, QUITE EXCRUCIATING.
HAVE A GOOD NIGHT, MY DEAR.
NO..!
BENNY AND I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN AROUND THIS TIME TOMORROW.
...PLEASE...
...I DON'T KNOW... ANYTHING...

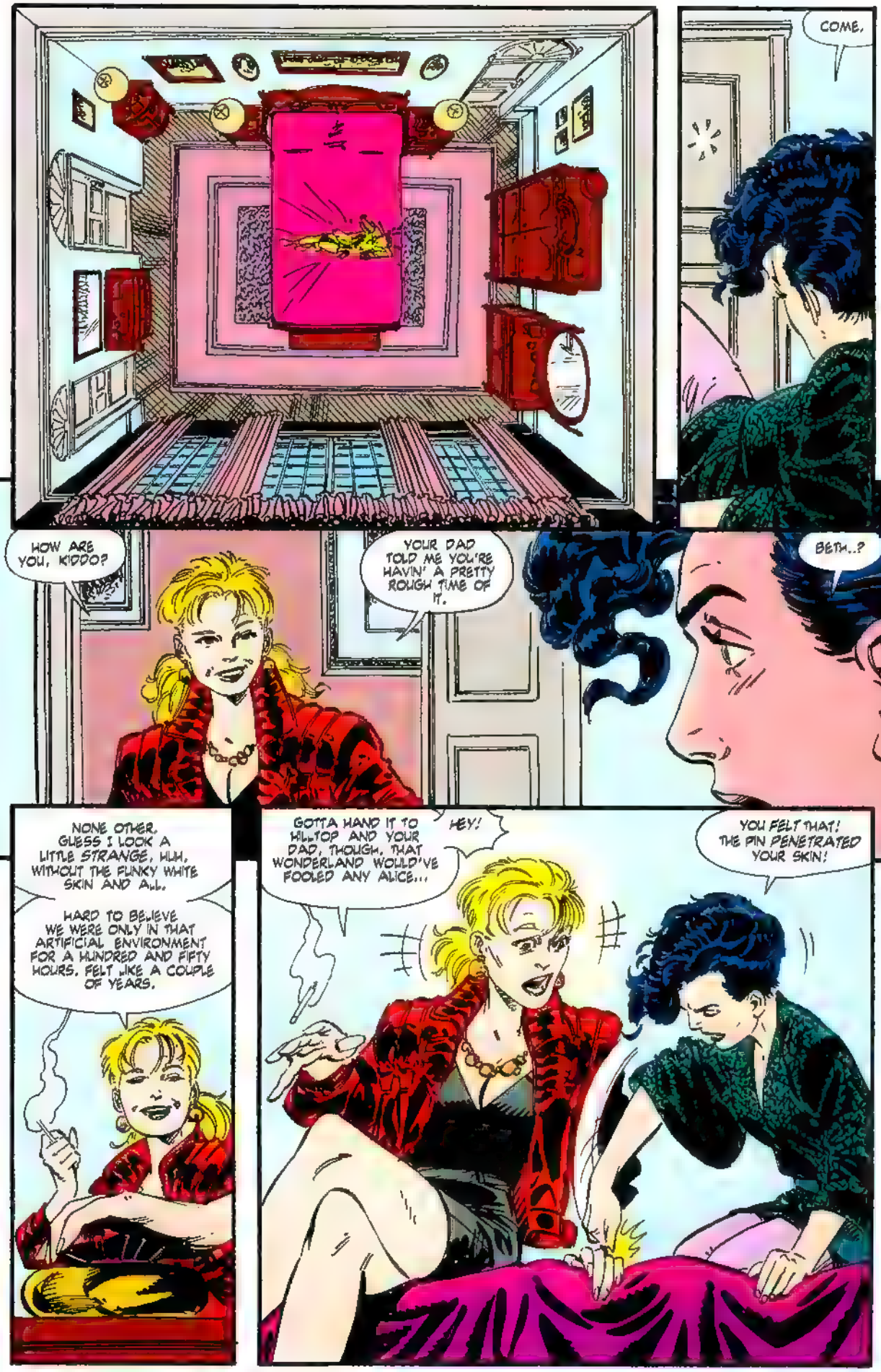

...PLEASE...
...PLEASE...
OKAY! OPEN 'ER UP!
YOU'VE DONE VERY WELL, DARLING.
BETTER THAN ANYONE EXPECTED!


Life is a very sad piece of buffoonery, because we have...the need to fool ourselves continuously by the spontaneous creation of a reality...which, from time to time, reveals itself to be vain and illusory.
Luigi Pirandello
1867 - 1936
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, DARLING?
DR. AXELROD WARNED US THERE MIGHT BE SOME AFTEREFFECTS.
WHERE.?
WHO..?
IT IS AS I FEARED.
SOME MEMORY DAMAGE HAS OCCURRED.
NO! NO! GET AWAY FROM ME!
THERE, THERE, DARLING! IT'S ALL RIGHT!
DAMMIT, AXEL, I KNEW I SHOULD NEVER HAVE LET YOU CAST YOURSELF AS THE VILLAIN IN THIS!
IT WAS, I FELT, A NECESSARY PART OF THE TEST.

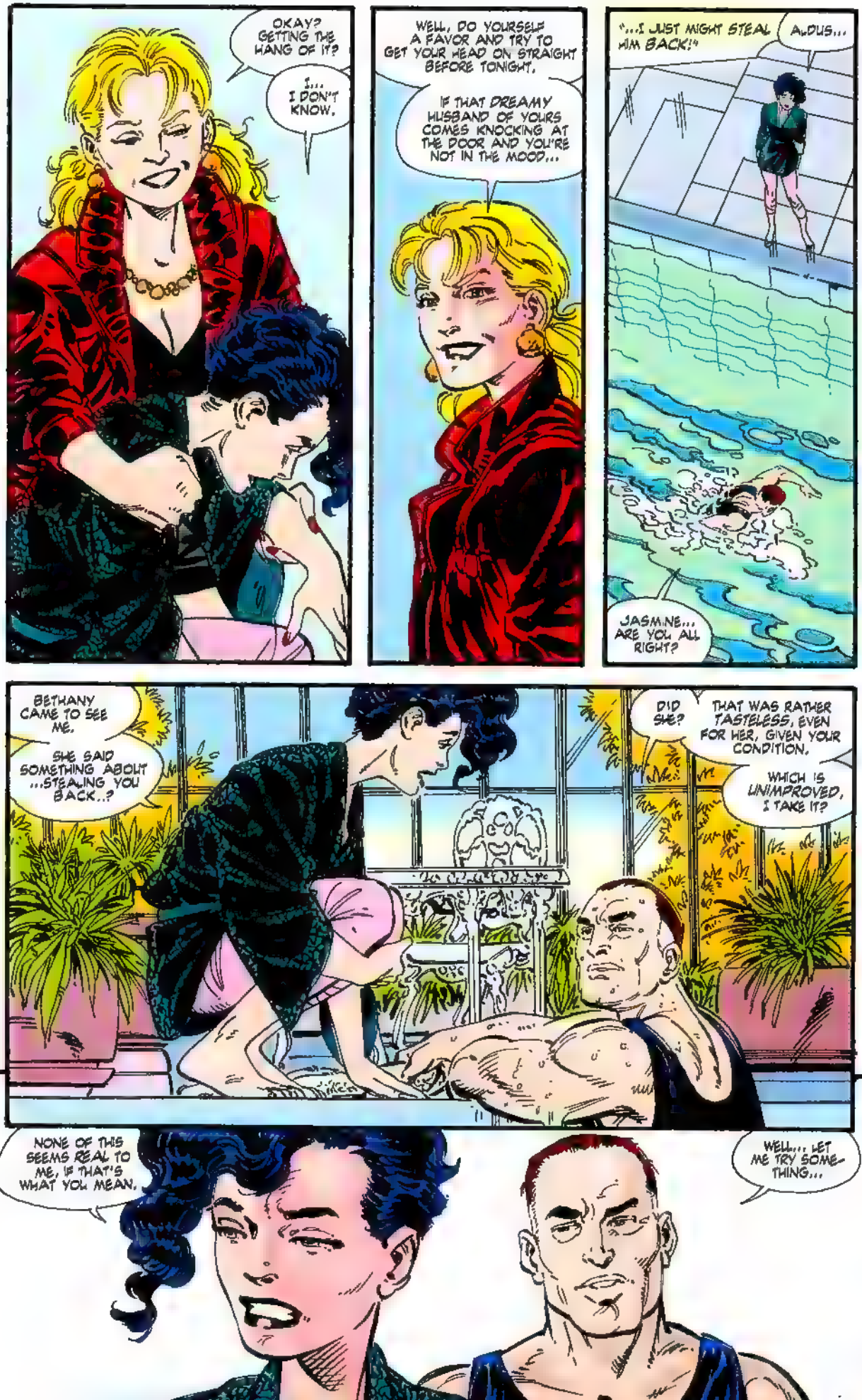

AFTER ALL, IF THE ILLUSION COULD BE SO COMPLETE THAT SHE WOULD FAIL TO RECOGNIZE HER OWN FATHER...
ALL RIGHT... GET THE OTHERS OUT, TOO.
OTHERS..?

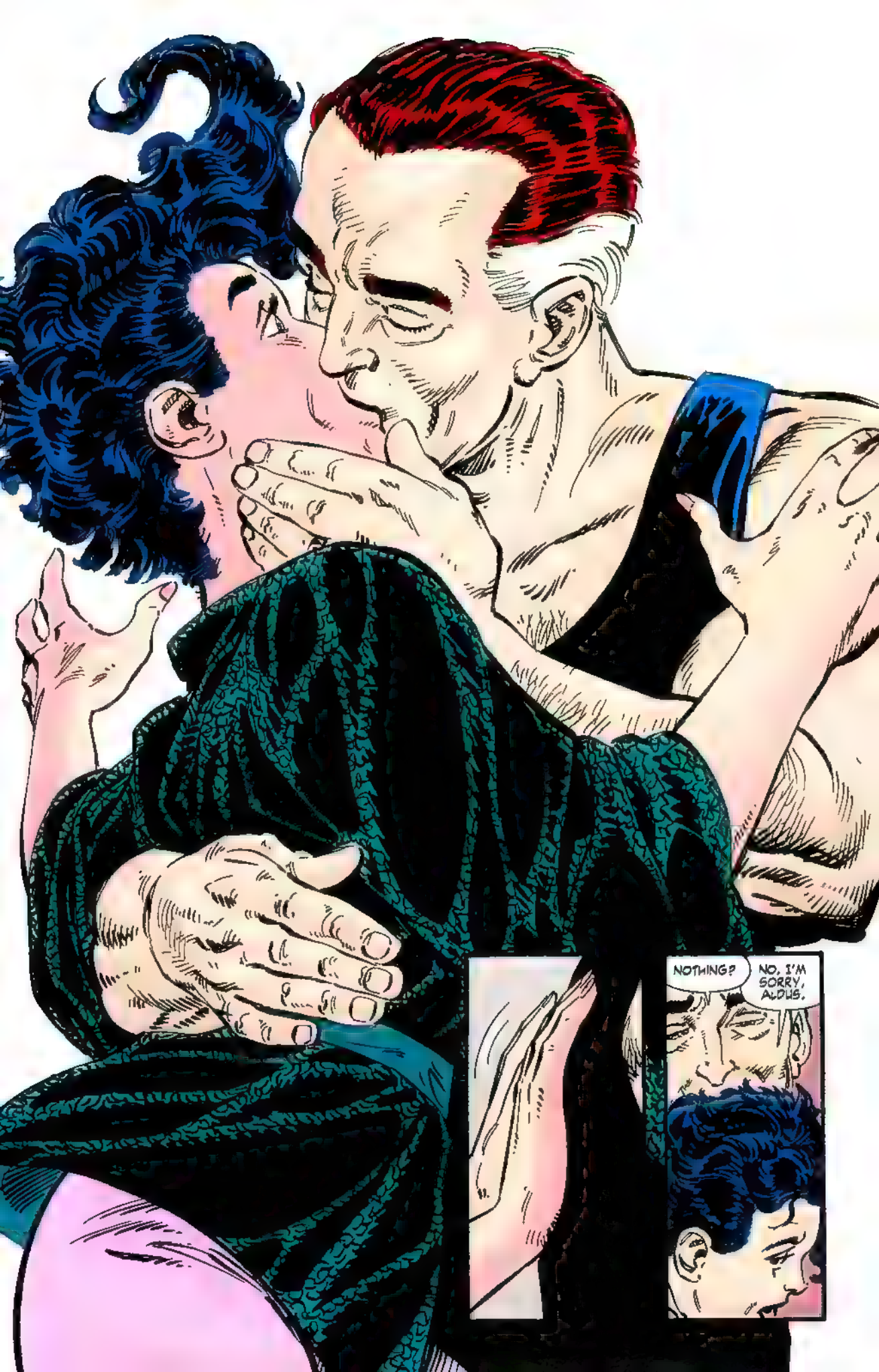

WELL, THAT WAS...
JAZZ? ARE YOU OKAY?
JACK..?
JAZZ? WHAT'S WRONG? WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT?
IT'S THE DISORIENTATION I WARNED ABOUT. I KNEW IT WAS TOO SOON AFTER LOSING THE BABY FOR JASMINE TO BE VOLUNTEERING FOR SUCH THINGS.
THE... BABY...
NATHAN?
DANNY?
BETHANY?
COME ALONG, DARLING. THE SOONER WE GET YOU OUT OF HERE AND BACK INTO FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS...
...THE SOONER YOU'LL START TO GET BACK ON TRACK.
JACK... JACK, I KNOW YOU'RE STILL MAD AT ME, BUT...
...HOLD ME, PLEASE.
HEY!

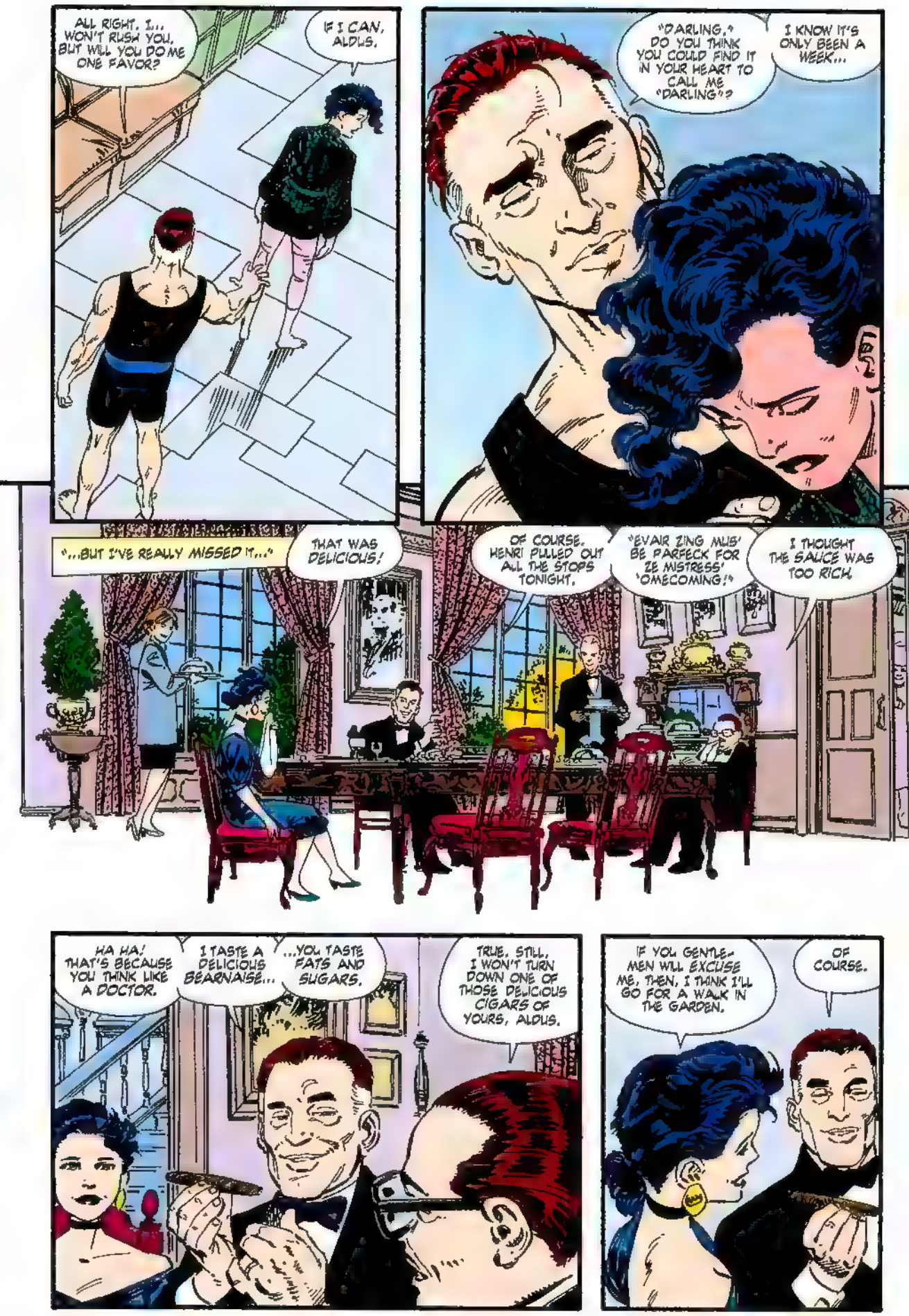

WHAT'S THE GAME, JASMINE? NOW THAT THE EXPERIMENT IS OVER...
...JACK AND I ARE BACK TOGETHER.
"I KNOW THIS IS DIFFICULT FOR YOU, DARLING...
...BUT YOUR FATHER IS CONVINCED IT WILL HELP YOU REACCLIMATE TO THE REAL WORLD IF YOU TALK ABOUT THE ILLUSION.
...ILLUSION...
I'M SORRY, DEAR. OBVIOUSLY THE MEMORY IMPLANT WORKED MUCH BETTER WITH YOU THAN WITH THE OTHERS.
THEY HAVE ALREADY GOTTEN BACK INTO THE ROUTINE OF THEIR NORMAL LIVES. IT IS A BITTER BURDEN THAT YOU SHOULD BE... DAMAGED.
TELL US, DARLING, TELL US ALL YOU CAN REMEMBER OF THE ILLUSION.
NO...
YOU FIRST. I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE.
WHY DO YOU KEEP CALLING ME "DARLING"?
WHY..?
BUT... DARLING... WHAT ELSE SHOULD A MAN CALL HIS WIFE?

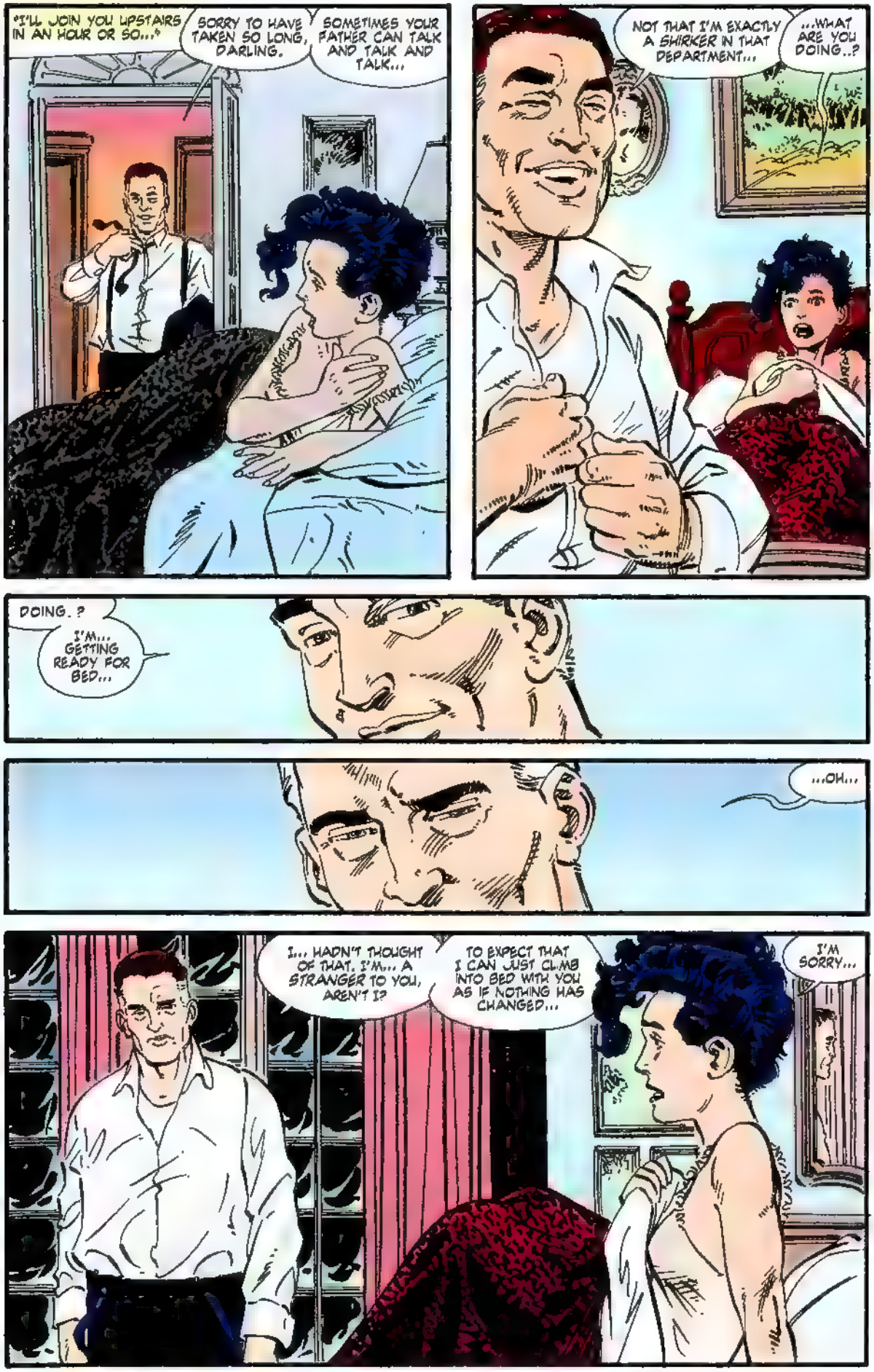

COME.
BETH..?
HOW ARE YOU, KIDDO?
YOUR DAD TOLD ME YOU'RE HAVIN' A PRETTY ROUGH TIME OF IT.
NONE OTHER. GUESS I LOOK A LITTLE STRANGE, HUH, WITHOUT THE FUNKY WHITE SKIN AND ALL.
HARD TO BELIEVE WE WERE ONLY IN THAT ARTIFICIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR A HUNDRED AND FIFTY HOURS. FELT LIKE A COUPLE OF YEARS.
GOTTA HAND IT TO HILLTOP AND YOUR DAD, THOUGH. THAT WONDERLAND WOULD'VE FOOLED ANY ALICE...
HEY!
YOU FELT THAT! THE PIN PENETRATED YOUR SKIN!

WELL SURE IT DID! JESUS CHRIST, JAZZ! CAN'T YOU GET IT INTO THAT HEAD OF YOURS?
THAT WAS ALL MADE-UP.
I'M NOT INVULNERABLE. YOU'RE NOT SUPER-ACROBATIC.
LOOK, TRY IT FOR YOURSELF. TRY AND RUN UP THE WALL.
GO ON! TRY!


OKAY? GETTING THE HANG OF IT?
I... I DON'T KNOW.
WELL, DO YOURSELF A FAVOR AND TRY TO GET YOUR HEAD ON STRAIGHT BEFORE TONIGHT.
IF THAT DREAMY HUSBAND OF YOURS COMES KNOCKING AT THE DOOR AND YOU'RE NOT IN THE MOOD...
"...I JUST MIGHT STEAL HIM BACK!"
AUDUS...
JASMINE... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
BETHANY CAME TO SEE ME.
SHE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT ...STEALING YOU BACK..?
DID SHE?
THAT WAS RATHER TASTELESS, EVEN FOR HER, GIVEN YOUR CONDITION.
WHICH IS UNIMPROVED, I TAKE IT?
NONE OF THIS SEEMS REAL TO ME, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU MEAN.
WELL... LET ME TRY SOMETHING...


NOTHING?
NO. I'M SORRY, ALDUS.


ALL RIGHT. I... WON'T RUSH YOU, BUT WILL YOU DO ME ONE FAVOR?
IF I CAN, ALDUS.
"DARLING," DO YOU THINK YOU COULD FIND IT IN YOUR HEART TO CALL ME "DARLING"?
I KNOW IT'S ONLY BEEN A WEEK...
"...BUT I'VE REALLY MISSED IT..."
THAT WAS DELICIOUS!
OF COURSE. HENRI PULLED OUT ALL THE STOPS TONIGHT.
"EVAIR ZING MUS' BE PARFECK FOR ZE MISTRESS' 'OMECOMING!"
I THOUGHT THE SAUCE WAS TOO RICH.
HA HA! THAT'S BECAUSE YOU THINK LIKE A DOCTOR.
I TASTE A DELICIOUS BEARNAISE...
...YOU TASTE FATS AND SUGARS.
TRUE. STILL, I WON'T TURN DOWN ONE OF THOSE DELICIOUS CIGARS OF YOURS, ALDUS.
IF YOU GENTLEMEN WILL EXCUSE ME, THEN, I THINK I'LL GO FOR A WALK IN THE GARDEN.
OF COURSE.

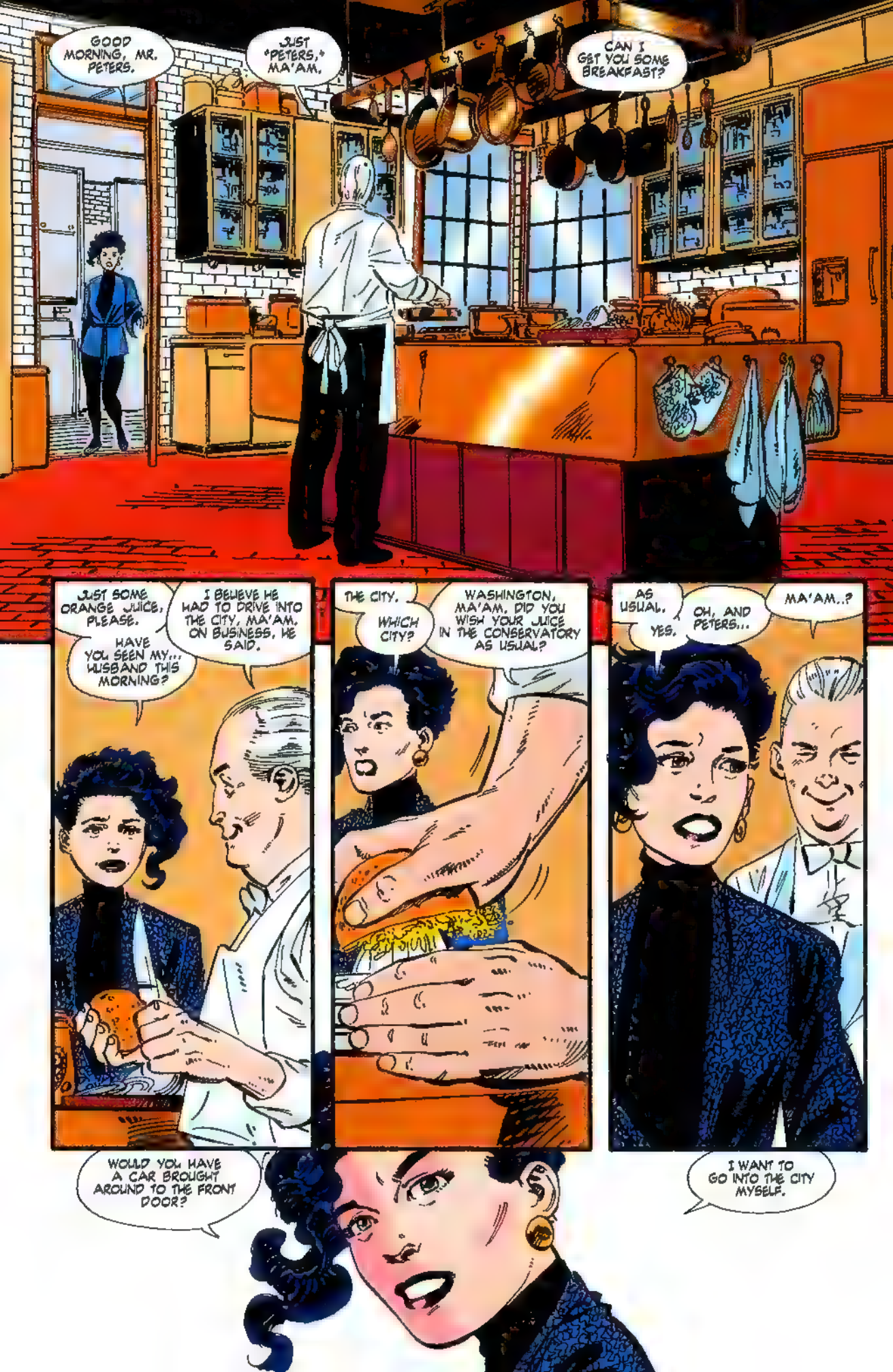

"I'LL JOIN YOU UPSTAIRS IN AN HOUR OR SO..."
SORRY TO HAVE TAKEN SO LONG, DARLING.
SOMETIMES YOUR FATHER CAN TALK AND TALK AND TALK...
NOT THAT I'M EXACTLY A SHIRKER IN THAT DEPARTMENT...
...WHAT ARE YOU DOING..?
DOING..?
I'M... GETTING READY FOR BED...
...OH...
I... HADN'T THOUGHT OF THAT. I'M... A STRANGER TO YOU, AREN'T I?
TO EXPECT THAT I CAN JUST CLIMB INTO BED WITH YOU AS IF NOTHING HAS CHANGED...
I'M SORRY...

NO... YOU KEEP APOLOGIZING, BUT IT'S I WHO SHOULD SAY HE'S SORRY.
IT'S QUITE IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO IMAGINE WHAT YOU WENT THROUGH IN THE LAST WEEK.
WEEK. YES. I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE IT WAS ONLY A WEEK.
FOR ME--FOR ALL OF US IN THAT... ARTIFICIAL REALITY, IT SEEMED LIKE A WHOLE LIFETIME.
I CAN REMEMBER EVERYTHING ABOUT LIFE IN THE GREENERY, ABOUT MY CHILDHOOD, MY HUGE CRUSH ON JACK, HOW DAVID INTERFERED BEFORE...
WELL... BEFORE WE CAME OUT AND EVERYTHING CHANGED AND... AND I THOUGHT WE'D LEFT A FALSE REALITY TO FIND A REAL ONE.
I REMEMBER ALL THAT, ALDUS. EVERYTHING.
EVERYTHING BUT ME.
WELL... NO. THAT'S THE FUNNY THING. I DO REMEMBER YOU, BUT NOT AS SOMEONE I KNEW.
I REMEMBER YOU AS THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES!
REALLY? THAT WASN'T IN THE BASIC PROGRAMMING. I SUPPOSE I SHOULD BE FLATTERED.
I DON'T THINK SO. I ALSO REMEMBER YOU AS A TOTALLY EVIL MAN.
AT LEAST... THAT'S WHAT CONTROL TOLD US...
WHO?

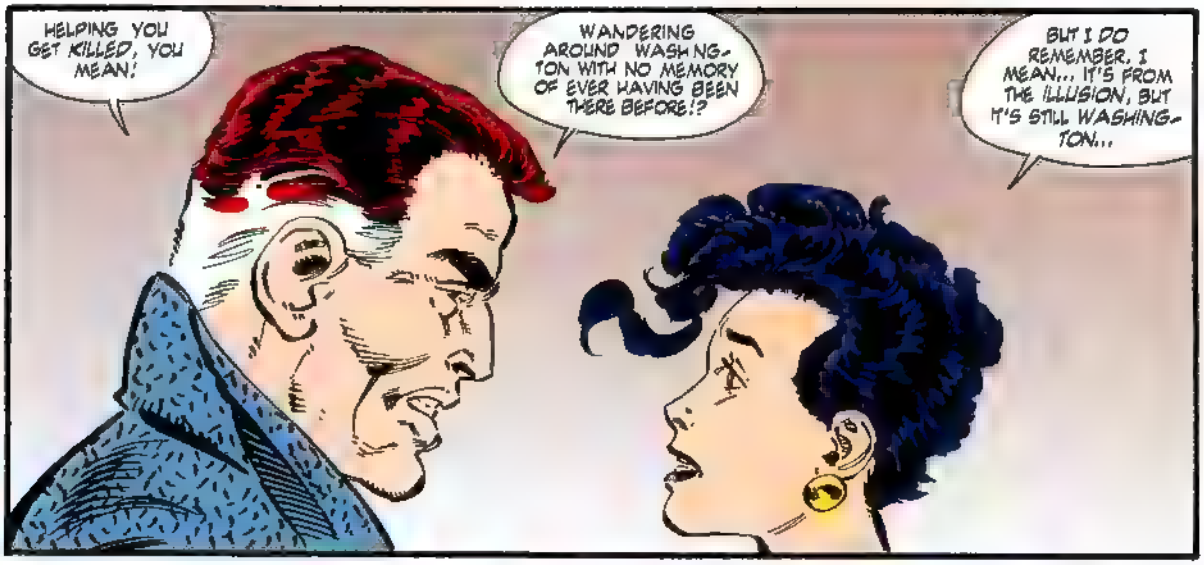
CONTROL. WILLIS DUCUMMEN. HE WAS THE HEAD OF THE SECRET GOVERNMENT BUREAU THAT... TOOK CARE OF US.
DUCUMMEN! WELL, THAT EXPLAINS SOMETHING, AT LEAST!
LISTEN TO ME, DARLING. WILLIS DUCUMMEN WAS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT, AT THE START. HE WAS ONE OF THE PROGRAMMERS YOUR FATHER BROUGHT IN TO SET UP THE SYSTEM.
BUT HE WAS ALSO TOTALLY INCOMPETENT. I FIRED HIM--OR, MORE PRECISELY, I GAVE HIM THREE WEEKS' NOTICE.
HE MUST HAVE USED THOSE THREE WEEKS TO INTRODUCE SOME KIND OF VIRUS INTO THE COMPUTERS.
A VIRUS AIMED STRAIGHT AT THE ONE THING I CHERISH ABOVE ALL--YOU.
YOU MEAN... IT'S BECAUSE OF HIM THAT MY MEMORY IS ALL MESSED UP?
THAT'S THE ONLY POSSIBLE ANSWER. YOUR FATHER PREDICTED A DEGREE OF TEMPORARY DISORIENTATION, AS I SAID...
...BUT FOR IT TO BE THIS DEEPLY INGRAINED, AND TO PERSIST THIS LONG.
ALDUS... THAT... FRIGHTENS ME! IF HE DID THAT TO ME... WHAT ELSE MIGHT HE HAVE DONE?
THERE'S NO NEED TO BE AFRAID, DARLING. NOW WE KNOW THE CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM, YOUR FATHER AND I CAN SEEK A SOLUTION.

"EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE..."

I JUST CAN'T MAKE THIS REAL.


GOOD MORNING, MR. PETERS.
JUST "PETERS," MA'AM.
CAN I GET YOU SOME BREAKFAST?
JUST SOME ORANGE JUICE, PLEASE.
I BELIEVE HE HAD TO DRIVE INTO THE CITY, MA'AM. ON BUSINESS, HE SAID.
HAVE YOU SEEN MY... HUSBAND THIS MORNING?
THE CITY.
WASHINGTON, MA'AM. DID YOU WISH YOUR JUICE IN THE CONSERVATORY AS USUAL?
WHICH CITY?
AS USUAL.
OH, AND PETERS...
MA'AM..?
YES.
WOULD YOU HAVE A CAR BROUGHT AROUND TO THE FRONT DOOR?
I WANT TO GO INTO THE CITY MYSELF.

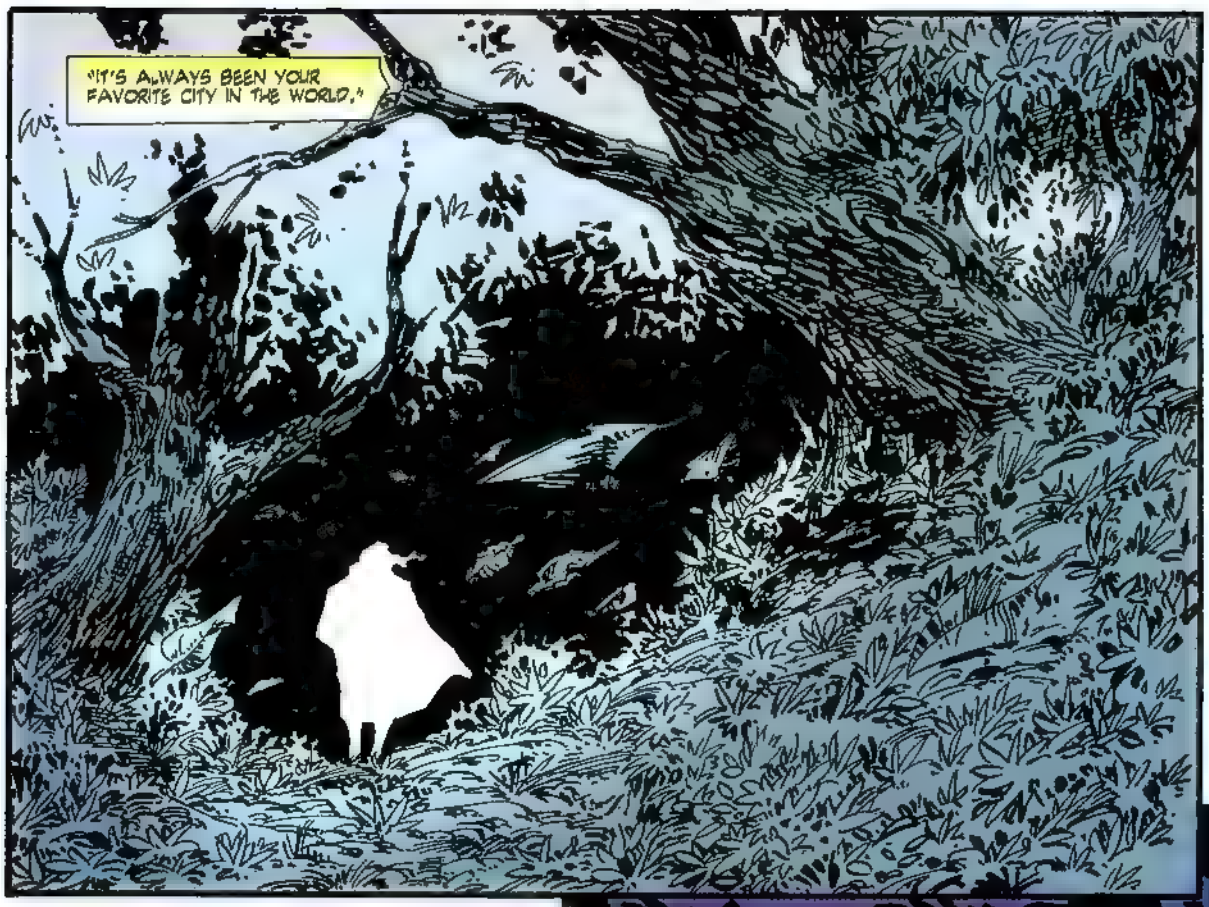
I'M SORRY, MA'AM.
THIS HAS NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE. SHALL I CALL PETERS TO SEND A CAR TO TAKE YOU BACK TO THE HOUSE?
I... SUPPOSE SO.
TOO BAD.
"I SEEM TO REMEMBER QUITE LIKING WASHINGTON..."
JASMINE! IS THIS TRUE?
WHAT?
DID YOU REALLY TRY TO GO INTO THE CITY WITHOUT ME?
WELL, TO COME AND VISIT YOU, ACTUALLY. I WANTED TO SEE WHERE YOU WORK.
AND PETERS LET YOU GO, JUST LIKE THAT? DEAR GOD, IS THE MAN INSANE?
I'M SURE HE MEANT NO HARM.
HE WAS JUST HELPING ME...


HELPING YOU GET KILLED, YOU MEAN!
WANDERING AROUND WASHING-TON WITH NO MEMORY OF EVER HAVING BEEN THERE BEFORE!?
BUT I DO REMEMBER. I MEAN... IT'S FROM THE ILLUSION, BUT IT'S STILL WASHING-TON...

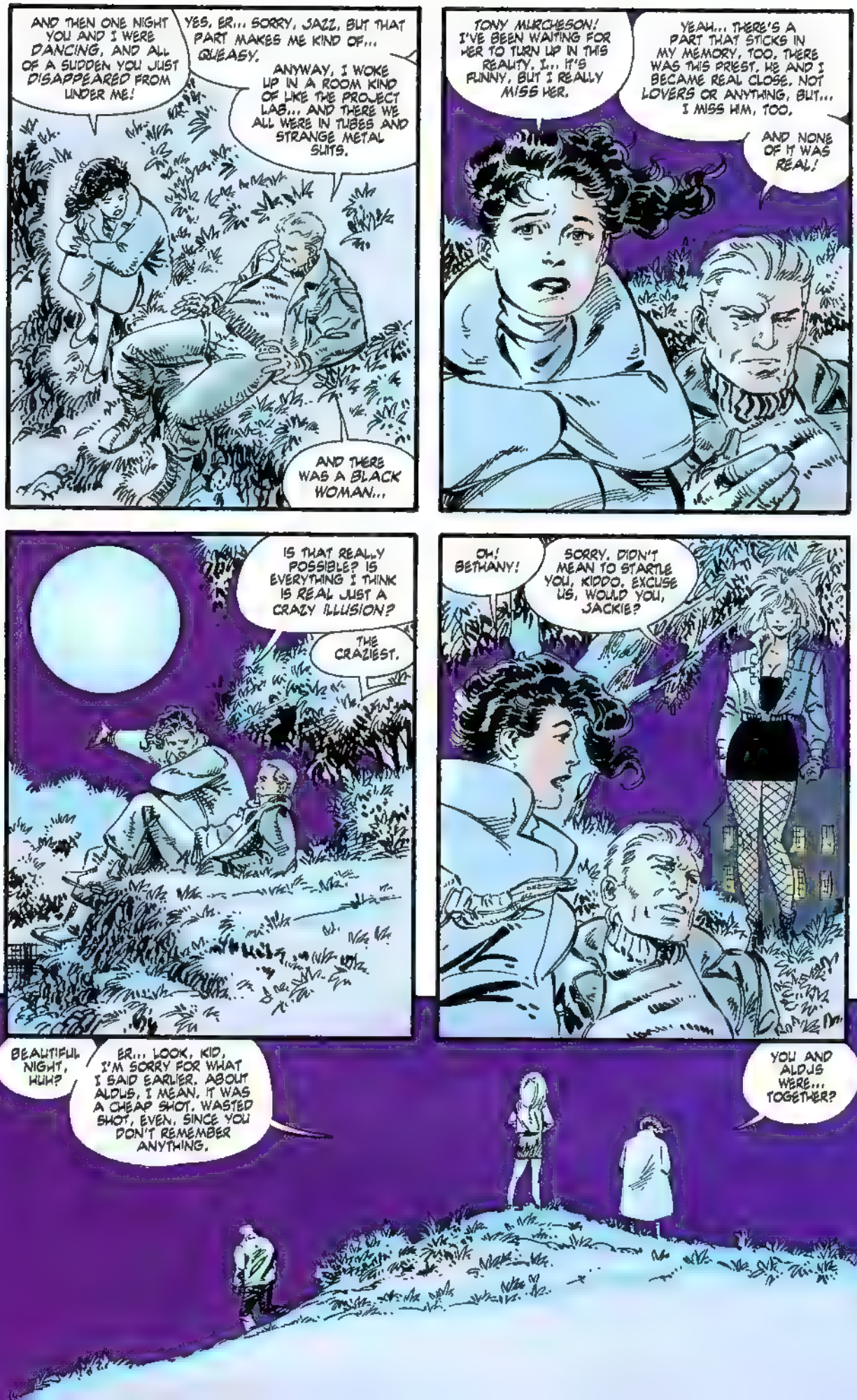
NO, IT ISN'T.
LISTEN TO ME, DARLING... I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU THINK WASHINGTON IS LIKE, BUT IT'S THE MOST DANGEROUS CITY IN THE WORLD.
I WOULD NEVER GO IN THERE MYSELF IF I DIDN'T HAVE TO.
WHY?

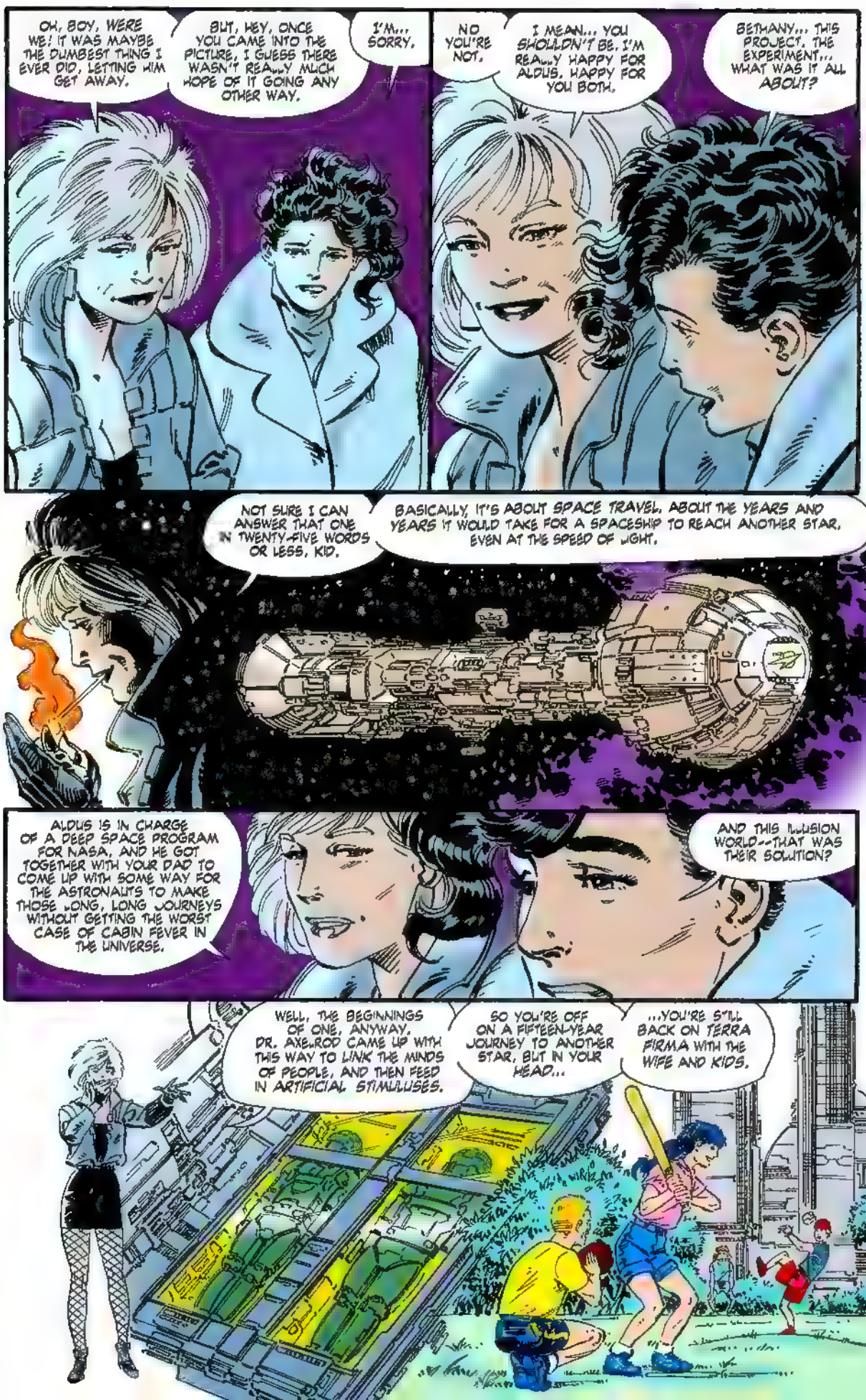
THE BLACKS, DARLING. TRY TO REMEMBER. THEY RUN THE WHOLE CITY.
THEY HAVE BARRICADES-- WHAT THEY CALL TOLL BOOTHS-- ACROSS ALL THE MAIN ROADS.
WHY, A BEAUTIFUL WHITE WOMAN LIKE YOU-- THEY'D HAVE YOU OUT OF THE CAR AND BE DOING GOD KNOWS WHAT TO YOU...
ALDUS!

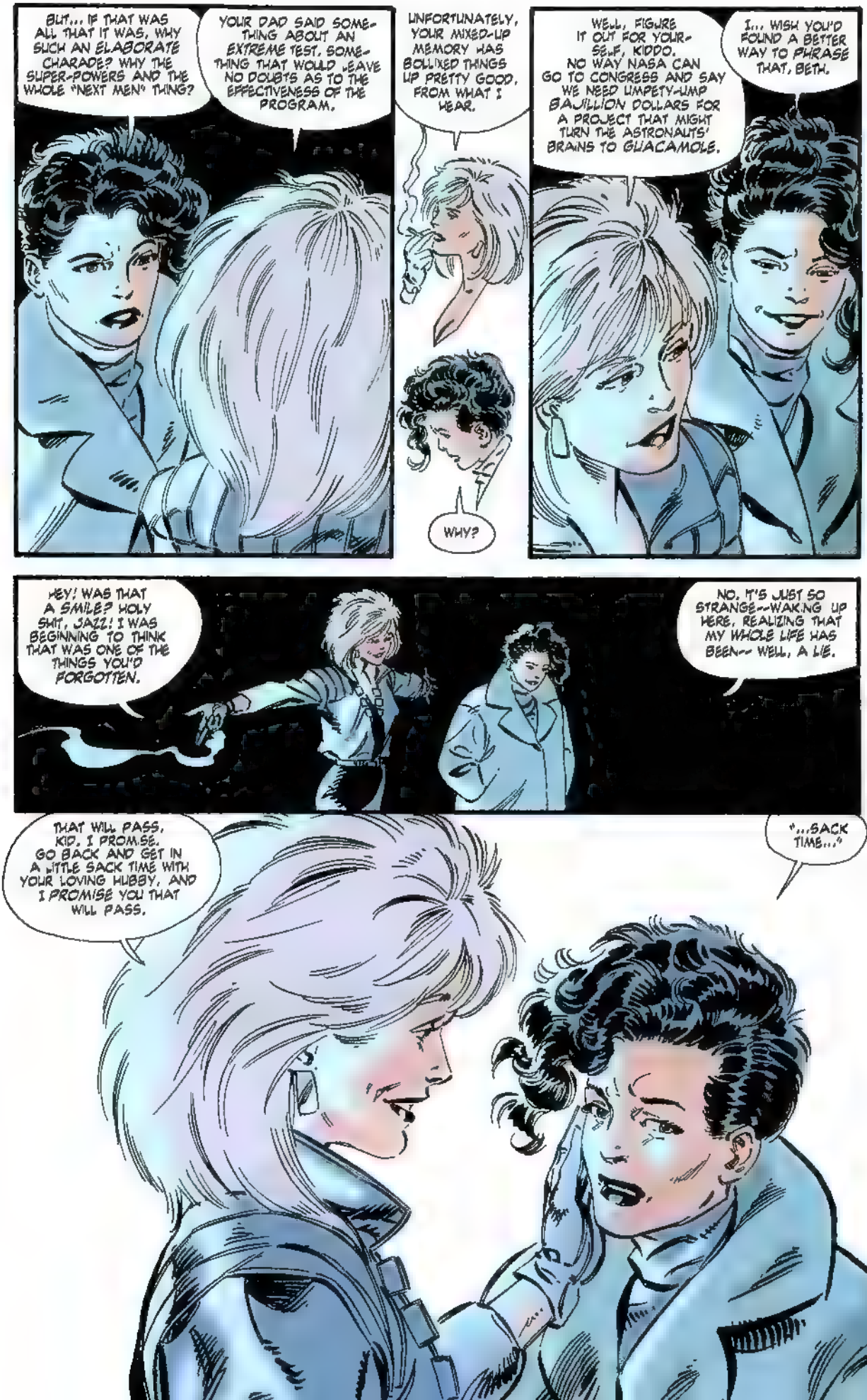
I'M SORRY, ALDUS. YOU'RE RIGHT. THE WASHINGTON I REMEMBER IS NOTHING LIKE THAT. I'M SORRY.
I PROMISE I WON'T TRY TO GO INTO THE CITY AGAIN.
THANK-YOU, DARLING. I'LL TAKE YOU TO PARIS AS SOON AS MY WORK HERE IS DONE. YOU REMEMBER PARIS?


"IT'S ALWAYS BEEN YOUR FAVORITE CITY IN THE WORLD."

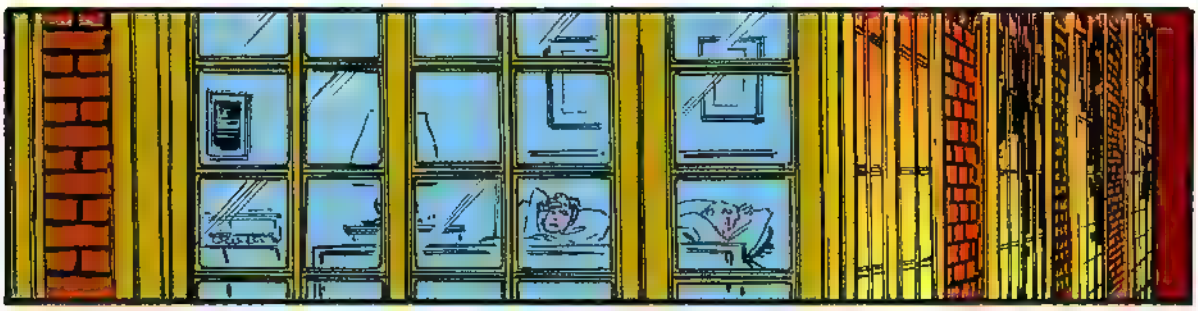
JACK!
I THOUGHT YOU'D LEFT... WITH NATHAN.
NO. PROFESSOR HILLTOP AND DR. AXELROD ASKED ME TO STAY ON FOR A FEW DAYS FOR SOME ADDITIONAL TESTS.
I'M HAVING SOME TROUBLES WITH MY MEMORY.
REALLY? ME TOO!
YES, YOUR HUSBAND TOLD ME. THAT GUY DUCUMMEN PUT SOME KIND OF VIRUS INTO THE SYSTEM, HUH?
IT WAS SUPPOSED TO ZAP YOU, BUT I GUESS IT GOT A PIECE OF ME, TOO.
I REMEMBER... A PLACE WE ALL CALLED THE GREENERY. I REMEMBER THAT THERE WERE LOTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE, SOME YOUNGER THAN US, SOME A BIT OLDER.
AND... SOMETIMES THE OLDER ONES WOULD START TO DEVELOP STRANGE POWERS. "REACHING," I THINK WE CALLED IT. AND WHEN THAT HAPPENED...
...THEY'D FADE.
YES. THEY'D JUST SORT OF... DISAPPEAR.
AND... WE WERE THE LAST FIVE LEFT, AND WE'D STARTED TO "REACH..."

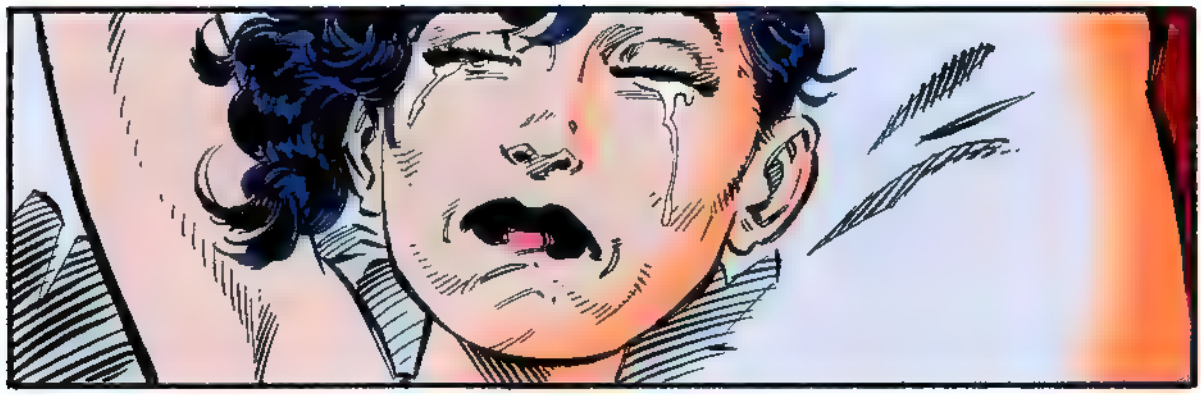

AND THEN ONE NIGHT YOU AND I WERE DANCING, AND ALL OF A SUDDEN YOU JUST DISAPPEARED FROM UNDER ME!
YES, ER... SORRY, JAZZ, BUT THAT PART MAKES ME KIND OF... QUEASY.
ANYWAY, I WOKE UP IN A ROOM KIND OF LIKE THE PROJECT LAB... AND THERE WE ALL WERE IN TUBES AND STRANGE METAL SUITS.
AND THERE WAS A BLACK WOMAN...
TONY MURCHESON! I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR HER TO TURN UP IN THIS REALITY. I... IT'S FUNNY, BUT I REALLY MISS HER.
YEAH... THERE'S A PART THAT STICKS IN MY MEMORY, TOO. THERE WAS THIS PRIEST. HE AND I BECAME REAL CLOSE. NOT LOVERS OR ANYTHING, BUT... I MISS HIM, TOO.
AND NONE OF IT WAS REAL!
IS THAT REALLY POSSIBLE? IS EVERYTHING I THINK IS REAL JUST A CRAZY ILLUSION?
THE CRAZIEST.
OH! BETHANY!
SORRY. DIDN'T MEAN TO STARTLE YOU, KIDDO. EXCUSE US, WOULD YOU, JACKIE?
BEAUTIFUL NIGHT, HUH?
ER... LOOK, KID, I'M SORRY FOR WHAT I SAID EARLIER. ABOUT ALDUS, I MEAN. IT WAS A CHEAP SHOT. WASTED SHOT, EVEN, SINCE YOU DON'T REMEMBER ANYTHING.
YOU AND ALDUS WERE... TOGETHER?


OH, BOY, WERE WE! IT WAS MAYBE THE DUMBEST THING I EVER DID, LETTING HIM GET AWAY.
BUT, HEY, ONCE YOU CAME INTO THE PICTURE, I GUESS THERE WASN'T REALLY MUCH HOPE OF IT GOING ANY OTHER WAY.
I'M... SORRY.
NO YOU'RE NOT.
I MEAN... YOU SHOULDN'T BE. I'M REALLY HAPPY FOR ALDUS. HAPPY FOR YOU BOTH.
BETHANY... THIS PROJECT. THE EXPERIMENT... WHAT WAS IT ALL ABOUT?
NOT SURE I CAN ANSWER THAT ONE IN TWENTY-FIVE WORDS OR LESS, KID.
BASICALLY, IT'S ABOUT SPACE TRAVEL. ABOUT THE YEARS AND YEARS IT WOULD TAKE FOR A SPACESHIP TO REACH ANOTHER STAR, EVEN AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT.
ALDUS IS IN CHARGE OF A DEEP SPACE PROGRAM FOR NASA, AND HE GOT TOGETHER WITH YOUR DAD TO COME UP WITH SOME WAY FOR THE ASTRONAUTS TO MAKE THOSE LONG, LONG JOURNEYS WITHOUT GETTING THE WORST CASE OF CABIN FEVER IN THE UNIVERSE.
AND THIS ILLUSION WORLD--THAT WAS THEIR SOLUTION?
WELL, THE BEGINNINGS OF ONE, ANYWAY. DR. AXELROD CAME UP WITH THIS WAY TO LINK THE MINDS OF PEOPLE, AND THEN FEED IN ARTIFICIAL STIMULUSES.
SO YOU'RE OFF ON A FIFTEEN-YEAR JOURNEY TO ANOTHER STAR, BUT IN YOUR HEAD...
...YOU'RE STILL BACK ON TERRA FIRMA WITH THE WIFE AND KIDS.


BUT... IF THAT WAS ALL THAT IT WAS, WHY SUCH AN ELABORATE CHARADE? WHY THE SUPER-POWERS AND THE WHOLE "NEXT MEN" THING?
YOUR DAD SAID SOMETHING ABOUT AN EXTREME TEST, SOMETHING THAT WOULD LEAVE NO DOUBTS AS TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAM.
UNFORTUNATELY, YOUR MIXED-UP MEMORY HAS BOLLIXED THINGS UP PRETTY GOOD, FROM WHAT I HEAR.
WHY?
WELL, FIGURE IT OUT FOR YOURSELF, KIDDO. NO WAY NASA CAN GO TO CONGRESS AND SAY WE NEED LIMPETY-UMP BAJILLION DOLLARS FOR A PROJECT THAT MIGHT TURN THE ASTRONAUTS' BRAINS TO GUACAMOLE.
I... WISH YOU'D FOUND A BETTER WAY TO PHRASE THAT, BETH.
HEY! WAS THAT A SMILE? HOLY SHIT, JAZZ! I WAS BEGINNING TO THINK THAT WAS ONE OF THE THINGS YOU'D FORGOTTEN.
NO. IT'S JUST SO STRANGE--WAKING UP HERE, REALIZING THAT MY WHOLE LIFE HAS BEEN-- WELL, A LIE.
THAT WILL PASS, KID. I PROMISE. GO BACK AND GET IN A LITTLE SACK TIME WITH YOUR LOVING HUBBY, AND I PROMISE YOU THAT WILL PASS.
"...SACK TIME..."

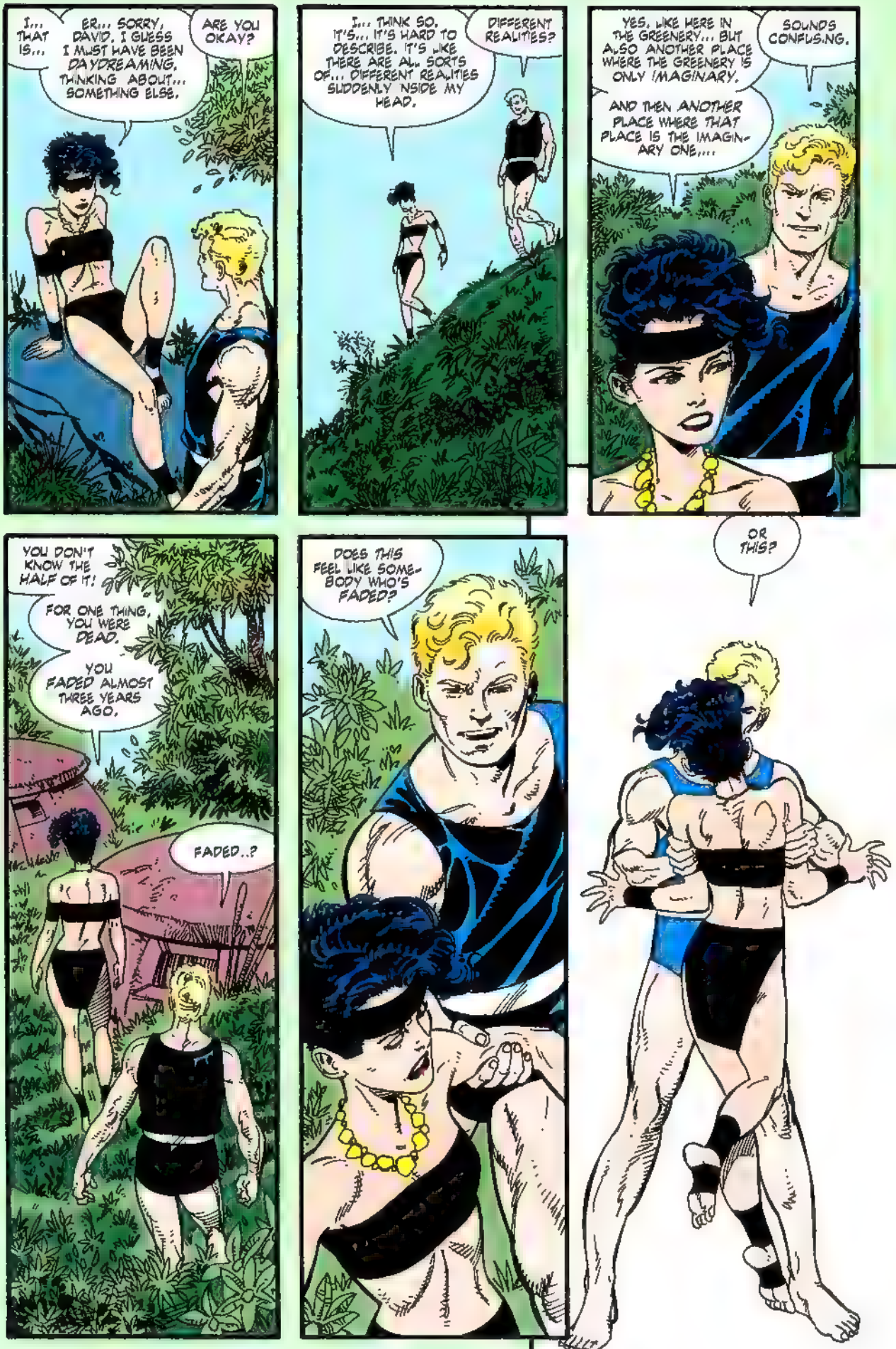
"YES..."
COME.
JASMINE... DARLING, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOU'RE COLD.
I WAS OUT WALKING AGAIN.
WALKING... AND THINKING ABOUT... THE PAST.
ABOUT US...
REALLY? YOU THINK YOU MIGHT BE REMEMBERING?
I... DON'T KNOW.
IT'S JUST THAT... EVERYONE IS SO FRIENDLY, SO SUPPORTIVE. YOU, BETH, THE SERVANTS. I FIND IT HARDER TO BELIEVE ALL THIS... LOVE COULD BE ANYTHING BUT REAL.
LOVE..?
LOVE, BETHANY THINKS THAT'S WHERE MY ANSWERS ME... DARLING.

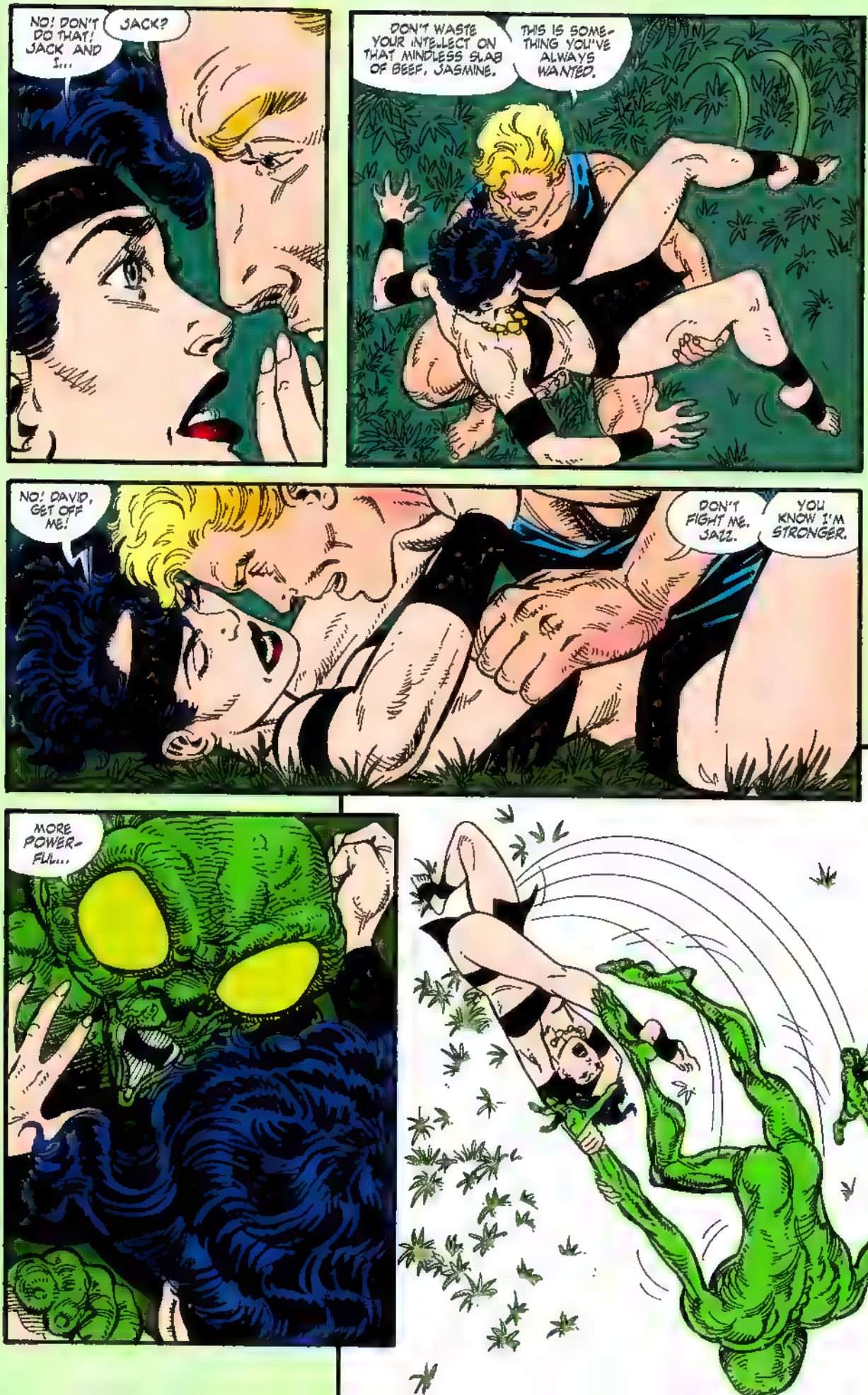




Lead me from the unreal to the real!
Lead me from the darkness to the light!

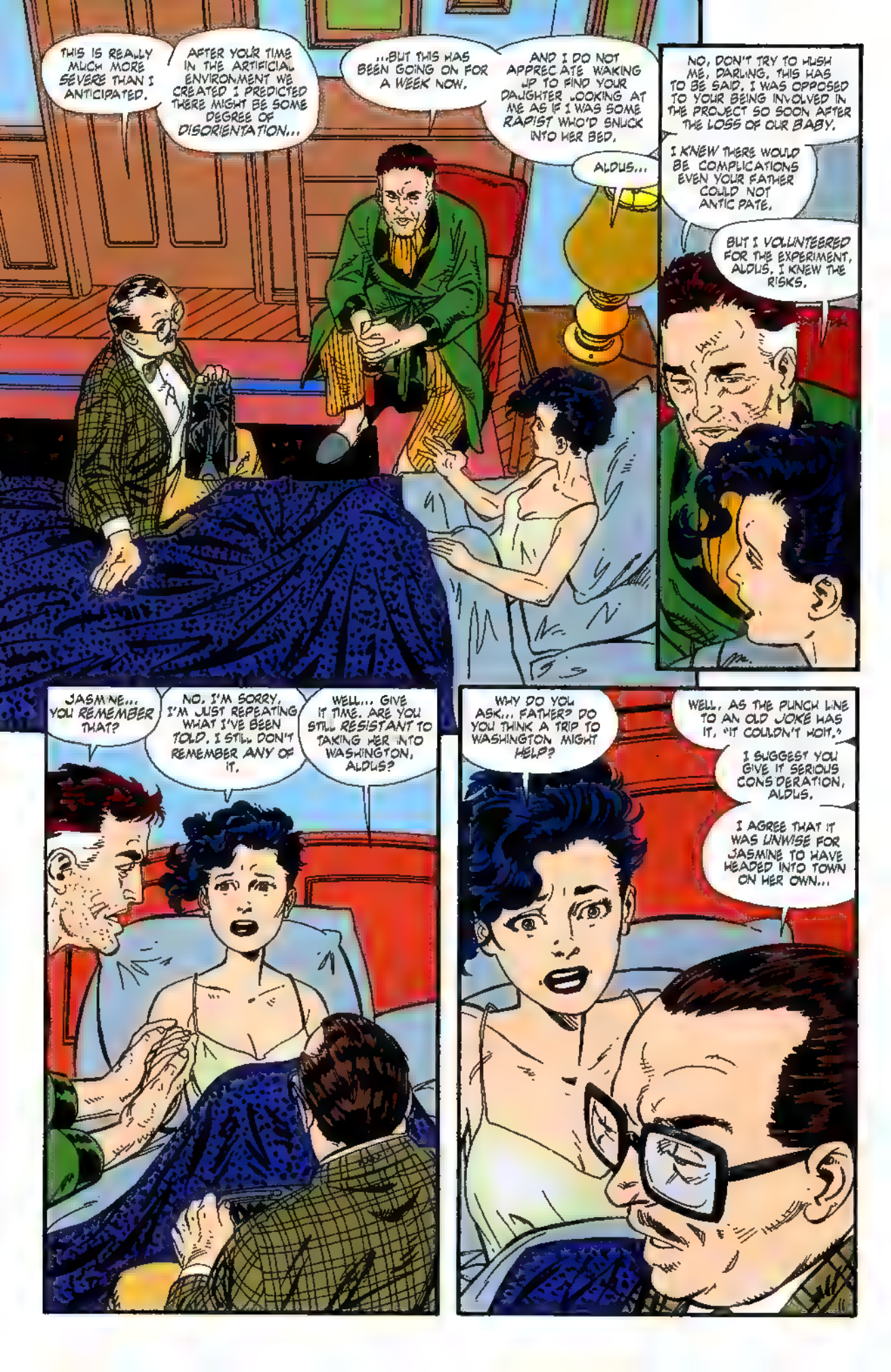
The Upanishads
circa 800 - 500 BC

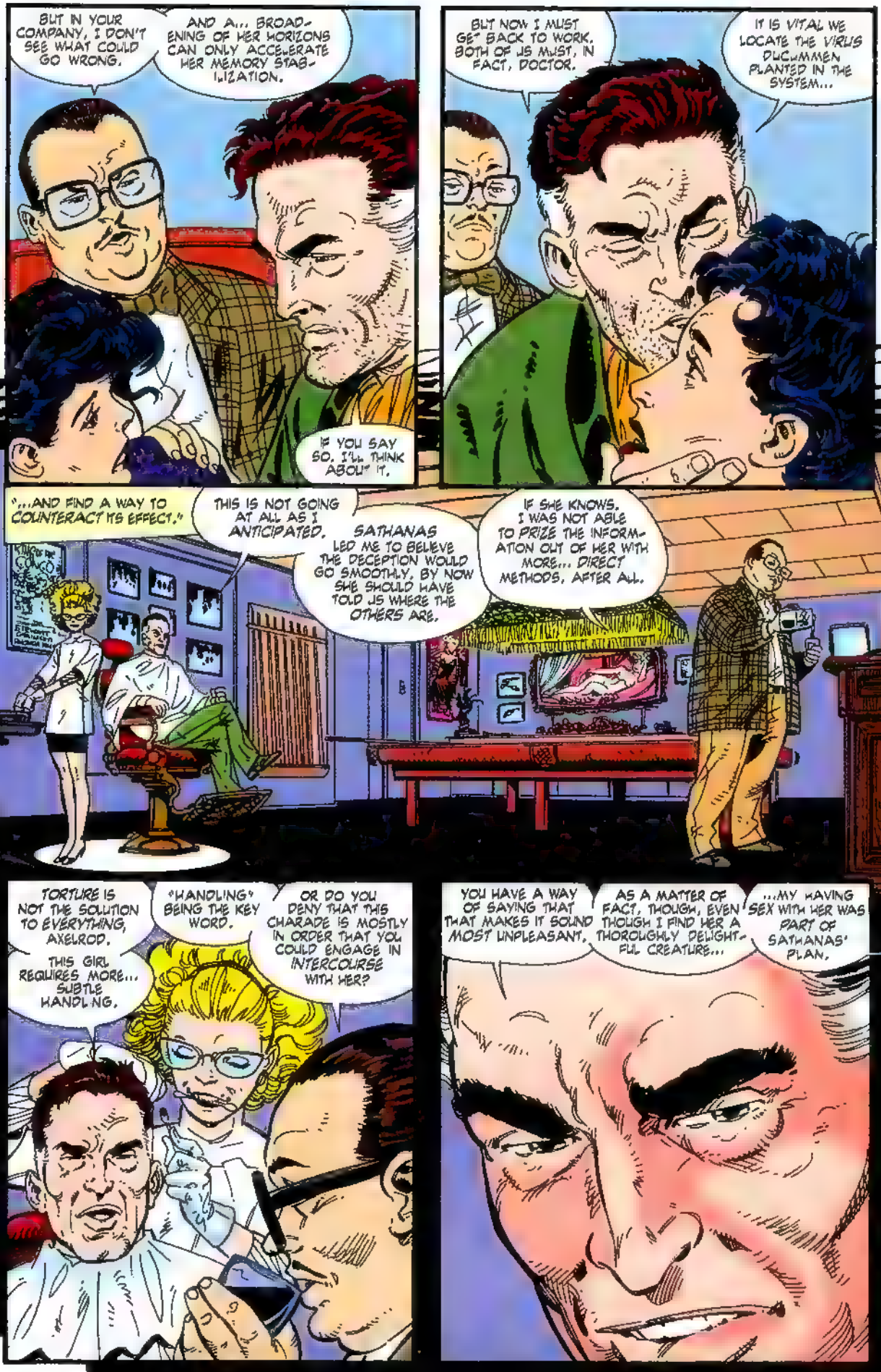

I... THAT IS...
ER... SORRY, DAVID. I GUESS I MUST HAVE BEEN DAYDREAMING. THINKING ABOUT... SOMETHING ELSE.
ARE YOU OKAY?
I... THINK SO. IT'S... IT'S HARD TO DESCRIBE. IT'S LIKE THERE ARE AL.. SORTS OF... DIFFERENT REALITIES SUDDENLY INSIDE MY HEAD.
DIFFERENT REALITIES?
YES. LIKE HERE IN THE GREENERY... BUT ALSO ANOTHER PLACE WHERE THE GREENERY IS ONLY IMAGINARY.
AND THEN ANOTHER PLACE WHERE THAT PLACE IS THE IMAGINARY ONE....
SOUNDS CONFUS.NG.
YOU DON'T KNOW THE HALF OF IT!
FOR ONE THING, YOU WERE DEAD.
YOU FADED ALMOST THREE YEARS AGO.
FADED..?
DOES THIS FEEL LIKE SOMEBODY WHO'S FADED?
OR THIS?


NO! DON'T DO THAT! JACK AND I...
JACK?
DON'T WASTE YOUR INTELLECT ON THAT MINDLESS SLAB OF BEEF, JASMINE.
THIS IS SOMETHING YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED.
NO! DAVID, GET OFF ME!
DON'T FIGHT ME, JAZZ.
YOU KNOW I'M STRONGER.
MORE POWERFUL...

DON'T RUN AWAY FROM ME, DARLING.
NO-OOOHHH!!!
DARLING! WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG??

OH!!
JASMINE!
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? DARLING...
WHERE AM I? WHO...
WHO...
THERE, THERE. JUST RELAX. TAKE A DEEP BREATH.
...ALDUS. ?

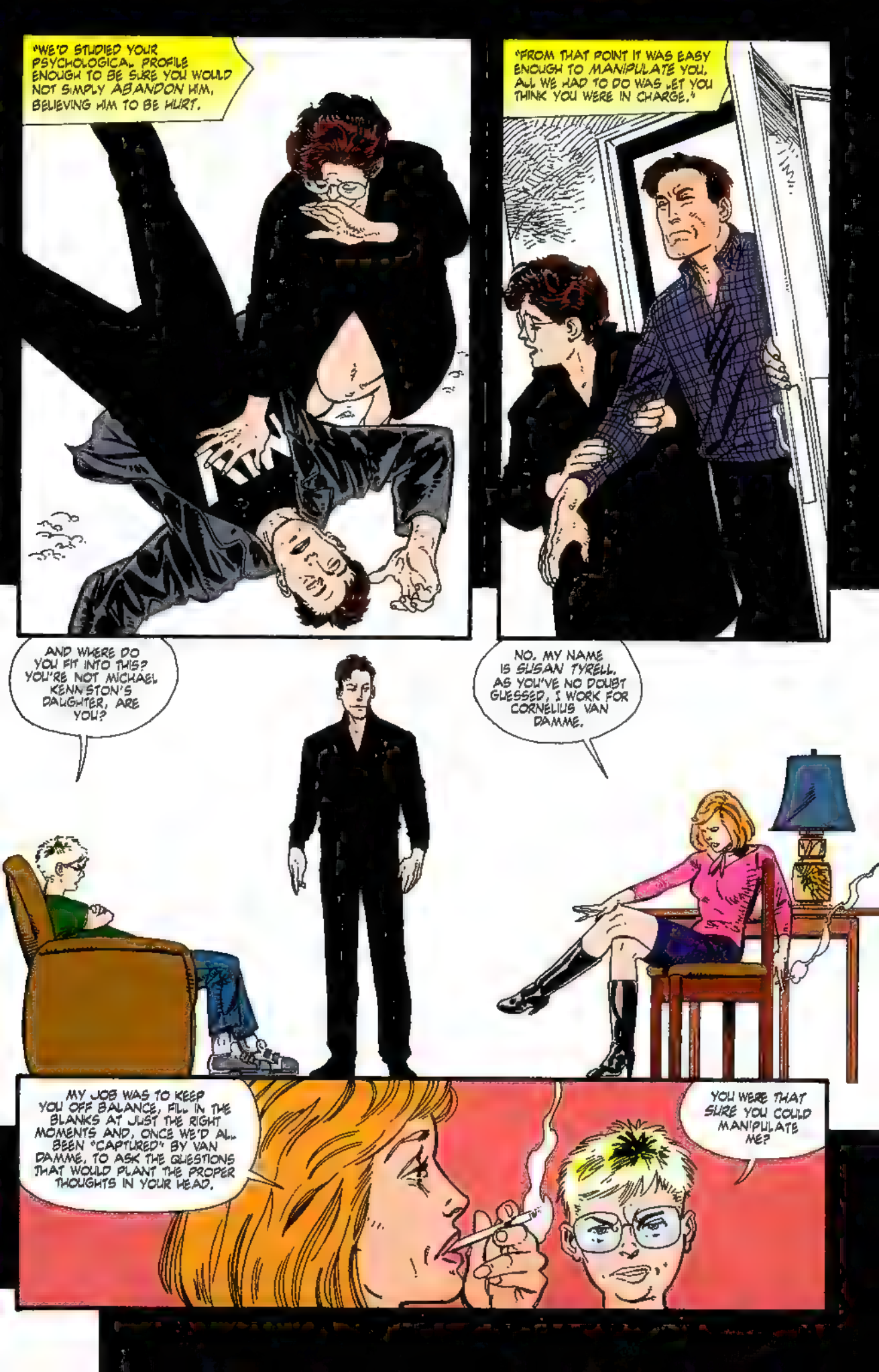

THIS IS REALLY MUCH MORE SEVERE THAN I ANTICIPATED.
AFTER YOUR TIME IN THE ARTIFICIAL ENVIRONMENT WE CREATED I PREDICTED THERE MIGHT BE SOME DEGREE OF DISORIENTATION...
...BUT THIS HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR A WEEK NOW.
AND I DO NOT APPRECIATE WAKING UP TO FIND YOUR DAUGHTER LOOKING AT ME AS IF I WAS SOME RAPIST WHO'D SNUCK INTO HER BED.
ALDUS...
NO, DON'T TRY TO HUSH ME, DARLING. THIS HAS TO BE SAID. I WAS OPPOSED TO YOUR BEING INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT SO SOON AFTER THE LOSS OF OUR BABY.
I KNEW THERE WOULD BE COMPLICATIONS EVEN YOUR FATHER COULD NOT ANTICIPATE.
BUT I VOLUNTEERED FOR THE EXPERIMENT, ALDUS. I KNEW THE RISKS.
JASMINE... YOU REMEMBER THAT?
NO. I'M SORRY, I'M JUST REPEATING WHAT I'VE BEEN TOLD. I STILL DON'T REMEMBER ANY OF IT.
WELL... GIVE IT TIME. ARE YOU STILL RESISTANT TO TAKING HER INTO WASHINGTON, ALDUS?
WHY DO YOU ASK... FATHER? DO YOU THINK A TRIP TO WASHINGTON MIGHT HELP?
WELL, AS THE PUNCH LINE TO AN OLD JOKE HAS IT, "IT COULDN'T WORT."
I SUGGEST YOU GIVE IT SERIOUS CONSIDERATION, ALDUS.
I AGREE THAT IT WAS UNWISE FOR JASMINE TO HAVE HEADED INTO TOWN ON HER OWN...

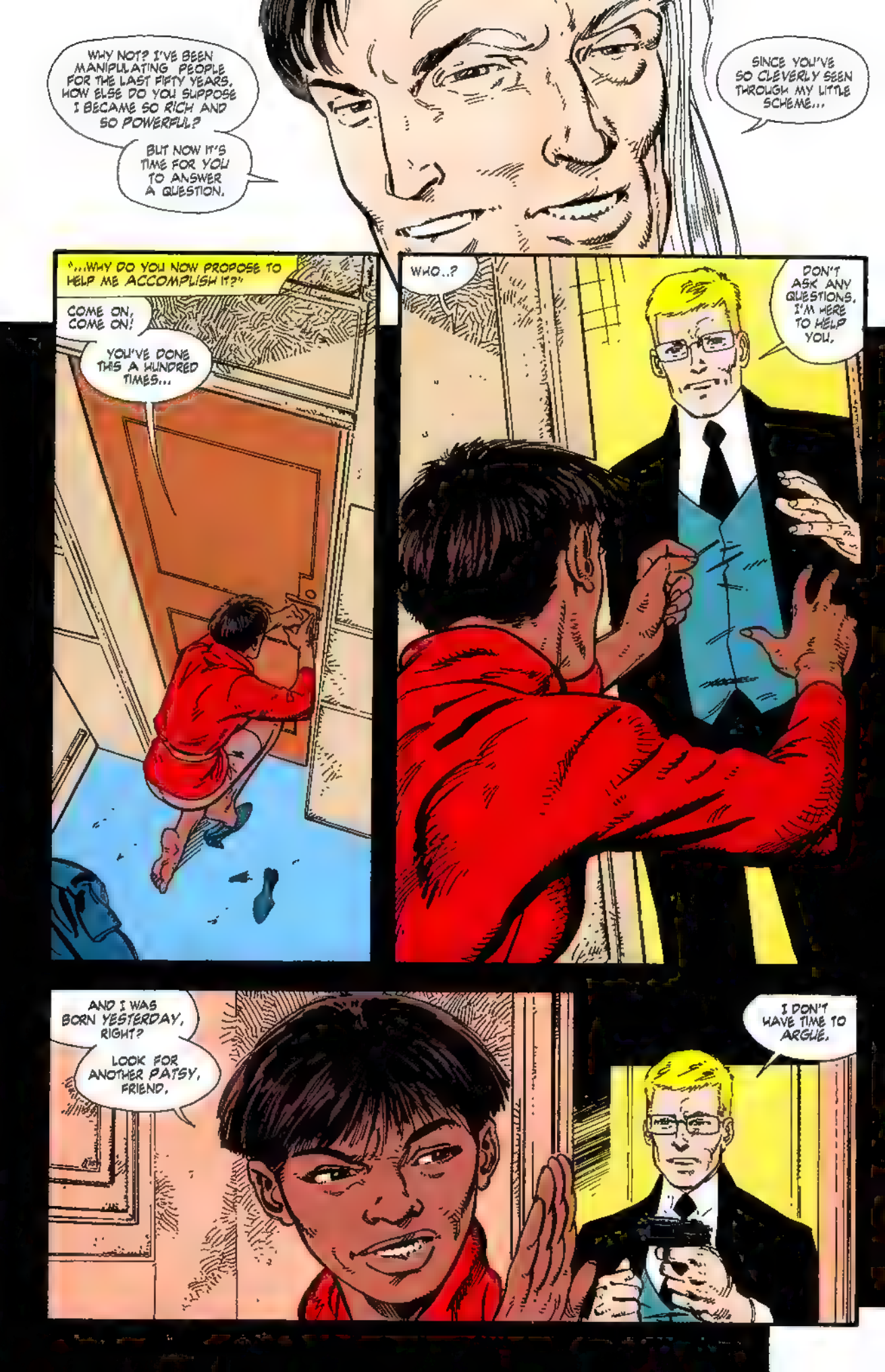

BUT IN YOUR COMPANY, I DON'T SEE WHAT COULD GO WRONG.
AND A... BROADENING OF HER HORIZONS CAN ONLY ACCELERATE HER MEMORY STABILIZATION.
IF YOU SAY SO. I'LL THINK ABOU" IT.
BUT NOW I MUST GE" BACK TO WORK. BOTH OF US MUST, IN FACT, DOCTOR.
IT IS VITAL WE LOCATE THE VIRUS DUCUMMEN PLANTED IN THE SYSTEM...
"...AND FIND A WAY TO COUNTERACT ITS EFFECT."
THIS IS NOT GOING AT ALL AS I ANTICIPATED.
SATHANAS LED ME TO BELIEVE THE DECEPTION WOULD GO SMOOTHLY. BY NOW SHE SHOULD HAVE TOLD US WHERE THE OTHERS ARE.
IF SHE KNOWS. I WAS NOT ABLE TO PRIZE THE INFORMATION OUT OF HER WITH MORE... DIRECT METHODS, AFTER ALL.
TORTURE IS NOT THE SOLUTION TO EVERYTHING, AXELROD.
THIS GIRL REQUIRES MORE... SUBTLE HANDLING.
"HANDLING" BEING THE KEY WORD.
OR DO YOU DENY THAT THIS CHARADE IS MOSTLY IN ORDER THAT YOU COULD ENGAGE IN INTERCOURSE WITH HER?
YOU HAVE A WAY OF SAYING THAT THAT MAKES IT SOUND MOST UNPLEASANT.
AS A MATTER OF FACT, THOUGH, EVEN THOUGH I FIND HER A THOROUGHLY DELIGHTFUL CREATURE...
...MY HAVING SEX WITH HER WAS PART OF SATHANAS' PLAN.

WHICH MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL, AND NEVER HAS.
WHY WOULD HE THINK THAT WAS IMPORTANT?
WHO KNOWS?
PERHAPS HE CONSIDERED IT SOME SORT OF REWARD FOR ALL MY YEARS OF LOYAL SERVICE.
LOYAL... TO THE POINT YOU FELT YOUR OWN ENDS WERE BEING SERVED.
AS DISTINCT FROM YOUR OWN MOTIVES IN SUCH MATTERS, IS THAT RIGHT, DOCTOR?
THANK YOU MAXINE, THAT WILL BE ALL.
YES, MR. PRESIDENT.
YOU'RE SURE IT'S SAFE TO DISCUSS THINGS IN FRONT OF THE HELP?
HOW REMARKABLY ELITIST OF YOU, AXELROD. AND HERE I ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU WERE A MAN OF THE PEOPLE.
LIKE ME.
THAT YOUNG WOMAN BELIEVES HERSELF TO BE SERVING A GREAT CAUSE IN THE NAME OF HER COUNTRY.
SHE WOULD NO MORE REVEAL WHAT SHE HAS HEARD THAN...
WELL, THAN ANY OF THE CAREFULLY SELECTED PEOPLE WITH WHOM I HAVE SURROUNDED MYSELF.

ARE YOU SURE THIS IS WISE, AMANDA?
NOW!
AFTER ALL THIS TIME YOU'RE STILL NOT SURE, MARK?
BUT... THIS IS WHAT YOU WANTED, ISN'T IT?
WHAT I WANTED?
OF COURSE. BUT BEFORE WE GET DOWN TO THE NITTY-GRITTY...
...I THINK IT'S TIME YOU ASKED CAROLYN TO JOIN US.
SHE IS CLOSE BY, RIGHT?
CAROLYN? AMANDA... CAROLYN IS DEAD.
NO. THAT'S WHAT YOU WANTED ME TO BELIEVE. LIKE YOU WANTED ME TO BELIEVE A LOT OF THINGS.
YOU WOULD HAVE GOT AWAY WITH IT, TOO, IF YOU'D BEEN ABLE TO KEEP ME OFF MY FEET, CONSTANTLY IN A SPIN LIKE IT WAS THE FIRST FEW DAYS WE WERE TOGETHER.
BUT IN THE WEEKS SINCE THE HELICOPTER CRASH I'VE HAD TIME TO REVIEW, AND NOW I UNDERSTAND WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON.
SO... WHAT ROOM IS CAROLYN IN?
THREE-OH-THREE.

"BUT HER NAME ISN'T CAROLYN..."
LET'S JUST RECAP, SHALL WE?
I MET YOU, MARK, WHEN I HIT YOU WITH MY CAR WHILE I WAS ON THE RUN FROM SOME NSA GOONS HILLTOP SENT AFTER ME.
THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN MY FIRST CLUE THAT EVERYTHING WASN'T KOSHER.
WHAT WAS IT THAT GOT HILLTOP TO PLAY ALONG? I CAN'T IMAGINE HE WAS IN ON THE WHOLE SCHEME, SINCE YOUR PLAN FROM THE START WAS TO REPLACE HIM.
QUITE SO.
THROUGH MY AGENTS IN WASHINGTON I ARRANGED FOR THEN VICE PRESIDENT HILLTOP TO RECEIVE INFORMATION WHICH WOULD LEAD HIM TO BELIEVE HIS TRUSTED SECRETARY AND MISTRESS WAS, IN FACT, AN ENEMY AGENT.
KNOWING HILLTOP AS WELL AS I DO, I KNEW HE WOULD NOT SIMPLY HAVE YOU ARRESTED. HE WOULD PLAY WITH YOU FIRST, AS A CAT WITH A MOUSE.
WEIRD TO HEAR YOU SPEAKING IN YOUR OWN RHYTHMS.
GO ON.
FROM THE MOMENT THE PLAN WAS PUT INTO EFFECT YOU WERE UNDER CONSTANT OBSERVATION.
"NO MATTER WHERE YOU RAN, YOU WOULD HAVE ENCOUNTERED MARK."


"WE'D STUDIED YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE ENOUGH TO BE SURE YOU WOULD NOT SIMPLY ABANDON HIM, BELIEVING HIM TO BE HURT.
"FROM THAT POINT IT WAS EASY ENOUGH TO MANIPULATE YOU. ALL WE HAD TO DO WAS LET YOU THINK YOU WERE IN CHARGE."
AND WHERE DO YOU FIT INTO THIS? YOU'RE NOT MICHAEL KENNSTON'S DAUGHTER, ARE YOU?
NO. MY NAME IS SUSAN TYRELL. AS YOU'VE NO DOUBT GUESSED, I WORK FOR CORNELIUS VAN DAMME.
MY JOB WAS TO KEEP YOU OFF BALANCE, FILL IN THE BLANKS AT JUST THE RIGHT MOMENTS AND, ONCE WE'D ALL BEEN "CAPTURED" BY VAN DAMME, TO ASK THE QUESTIONS THAT WOULD PLANT THE PROPER THOUGHTS IN YOUR HEAD.
YOU WERE THAT SURE YOU COULD MANIPULATE ME?


WHY NOT? I'VE BEEN MANIPULATING PEOPLE FOR THE LAST FIFTY YEARS. HOW ELSE DO YOU SUPPOSE I BECAME SO RICH AND SO POWERFUL?
BUT NOW IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO ANSWER A QUESTION.
SINCE YOU'VE SO CLEVERLY SEEN THROUGH MY LITTLE SCHEME...
"...WHY DO YOU NOW PROPOSE TO HELP ME ACCOMPLISH IT?"
COME ON, COME ON!
YOU'VE DONE THIS A HUNDRED TIMES...
WHO..?
DON'T ASK ANY QUESTIONS. I'M HERE TO HELP YOU.
AND I WAS BORN YESTERDAY, RIGHT?
LOOK FOR ANOTHER PATSY, FRIEND.
I DON'T HAVE TIME TO ARGUE.

"YOU'RE COMING WITH ME."
IDENTIFICATION, PLEASE.
OH...!
YES, SIR!
WELCOME BACK, SIR.
THEY CERTAINLY SEEM TO RESPECT YOU AROUND HERE... DARLING.
YES. BUT I'D WILLINGLY TRADE EVERY OUNCE OF IT TO HEAR THE HESITATION VANISH FROM YOUR VOICE WHEN YOU CALL ME "DARLING."
I'M SORRY. BUT... ALL THIS IS STILL SO STRANGE. I MEAN... I BELIEVE IT...
...BUT I DON'T FEEL IT.
THAT WILL COME. I...

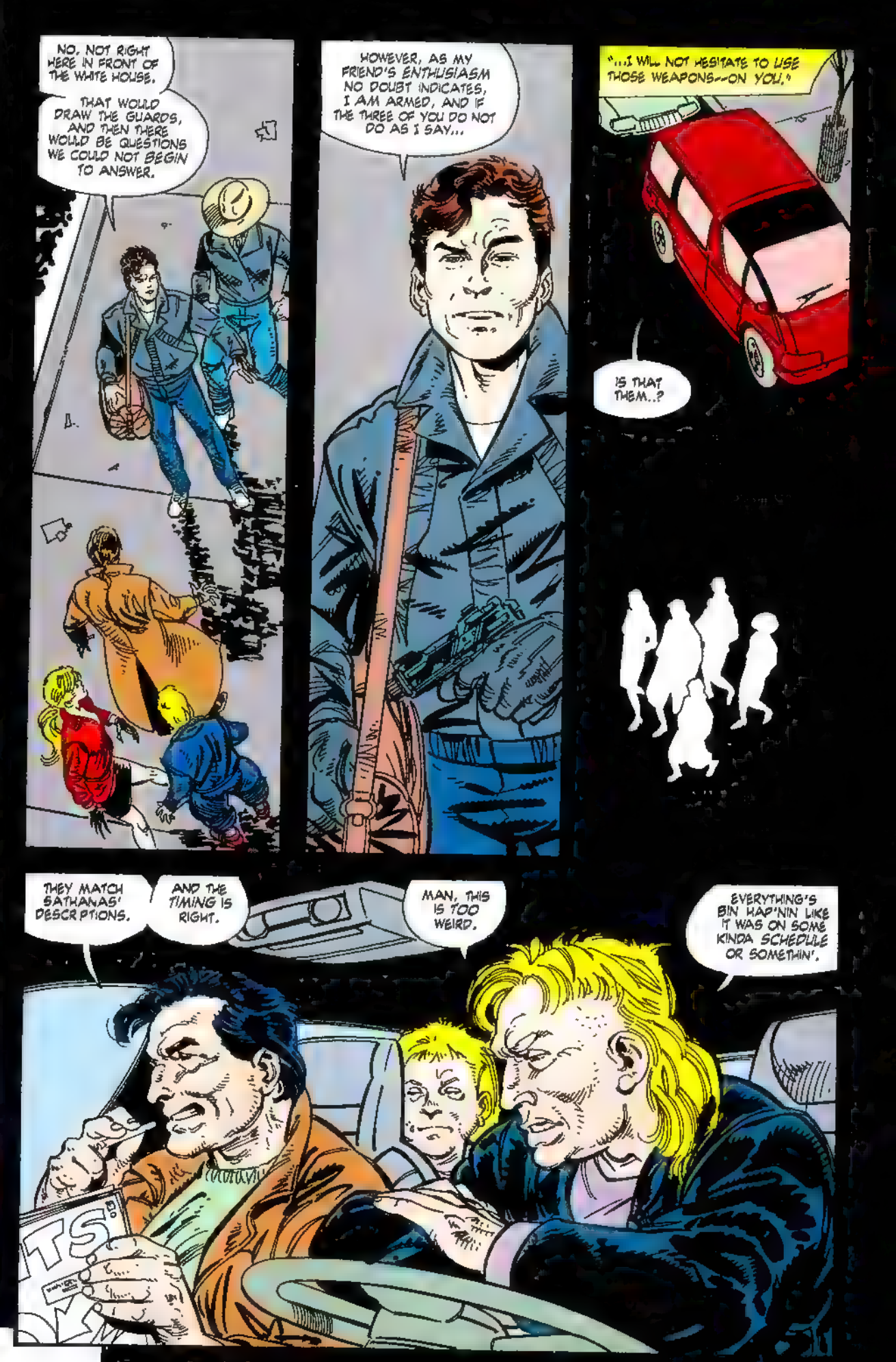
ALDUS? WHAT'S WRONG?
I... I DON'T KNOW. FELT... WEAK ALL OF A SUDDEN.
"AS IF I HADN'T EATEN IN DAYS..."
MISS ALEXANDER... I WONDER IF I COULD PREVAIL UPON YOU TO ENTERTAIN MY WIFE WHILE I SEE THE PRESIDENT?
CERTAINLY, MR... PROFESSOR HILLTOP.
WELL? WHAT'S THE GAME THIS TIME, HILLTOP?
DUCHIMMEN! WHAT IN HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?
MY JOB.
BAD ENOUGH YOU'VE SEEN FIT TO PLAY THESE MIND-GAMES WITH JASMINE.
WHAT IN GOD'S NAME DO YOU THINK YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH BY BRINGING HER HERE?
PERHAPS NOTHING. PERHAPS EVERYTHING. IN ANY CASE IT'S NONE OF YOUR...
HILLTOP..?

...NONE...
...OF...
...YOUR...
HILLTOP!
WHAT THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN DOING TO YOURSELF, MAN? YOU'RE WHITE AS A SHEET!
...WEAK...
...HUNGRY...

MISTER PRESIDENT...

ALDUS ? WERE YOU GOING TO... OH!

WELL, THERE IT IS. I STILL THINK THIS IS INSANE.
WHY? HE IS MY BIOLOGICAL FATHER.
WHICH BIT OF PERTINENT INFORMATION YOU NEGLECTED TO MENTION AL... THESE MONTHS. I'D STILL LIKE TO KNOW WHY.
I DON'T KNOW. IT JUST... DIDN'T SEEM LIKE SOMETHING YOU NEEDED TO KNOW.
BLAME OUR TRAINING, BETH. WE WERE ALL PROGRAMMED TO KEEP SECRETS--EVEN FROM EACH OTHER.
BUT ACCORDING TO CONTROL, THIS MAN WILLTOP IS OUR MOST DANGEROUS ENEMY.
NOT THAT I PARTICULARLY TRUST CONTROL ANYMORE.
THEN WE'RE GOING IN?
WE'RE GOING IN.
NO, YOU'RE NOT.
NOT YET, ANYWAY.
FOR GOD'S SAKE, TOMMY! DON'T TAKE ANY CHANCES.
SHOOT THEM!

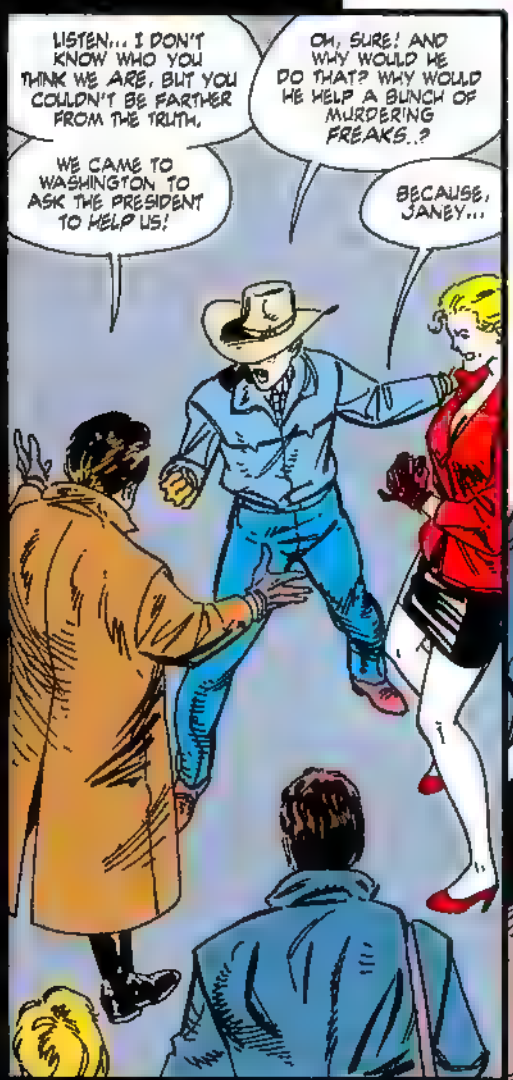

NO, NOT RIGHT HERE IN FRONT OF THE WHITE HOUSE.
THAT WOULD DRAW THE GUARDS, AND THEN THERE WOULD BE QUESTIONS WE COULD NOT BEGIN TO ANSWER.
HOWEVER, AS MY FRIEND'S ENTHUSIASM NO DOUBT INDICATES, I AM ARMED, AND IF THE THREE OF YOU DO NOT DO AS I SAY...
"...I WILL NOT HESITATE TO USE THOSE WEAPONS--ON YOU."
IS THAT THEM..?
THEY MATCH SATHANAS' DESCRIPTIONS.
AND THE TIMING IS RIGHT.
MAN, THIS IS TOO WEIRD.
EVERYTHING'S BIN HAP'NIN LIKE IT WAS ON SOME KINDA SCHEDULE OR SOMETHIN'.

"HOW COULD SATHANAS HAVE KNOWN WHAT WAS GONNA HAPPEN AFTER HE WAS DEAD?"
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO ME? WHAT'S GOING ON?
ALDUS... DARLING... IF THERE'S A PROBLEM, LET ME HELP.
PROBLEM .?
YOU CANNOT BEGIN TO COMPREHEND THE ENORMITY OF THE "PROBLEM."
HE KNEW THIS WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME. HE KNEW EVERYTHING.
AND HE DIDN'T WARN ME! HE LET IT HAPPEN! HE WANTED IT TO HAPPEN.
BECAUSE HE WOULD NEVER HAVE EXISTED IF IT HADN'T HAPPENED!
WHO?? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT??
SATHANAS! IT'S ALL SO OBVIOUS NOW I'M AMAZED I DIDN'T SEE IT BEFORE!
HE KNEW EVERYTHING ABOUT ME! HE KNEW EVERY DETAIL OF MY LIFE! EVEN THE THINGS THAT HADN'T HAPPENED YET!

AND HE KNEW BECAUSE HE WAS ME!
I AM SATHANAS!

WELL..? ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME YOU TOLD US WHAT THIS WAS ALL ABOUT?
YEAH, I'LL TELL YOU, YOU BITCH!

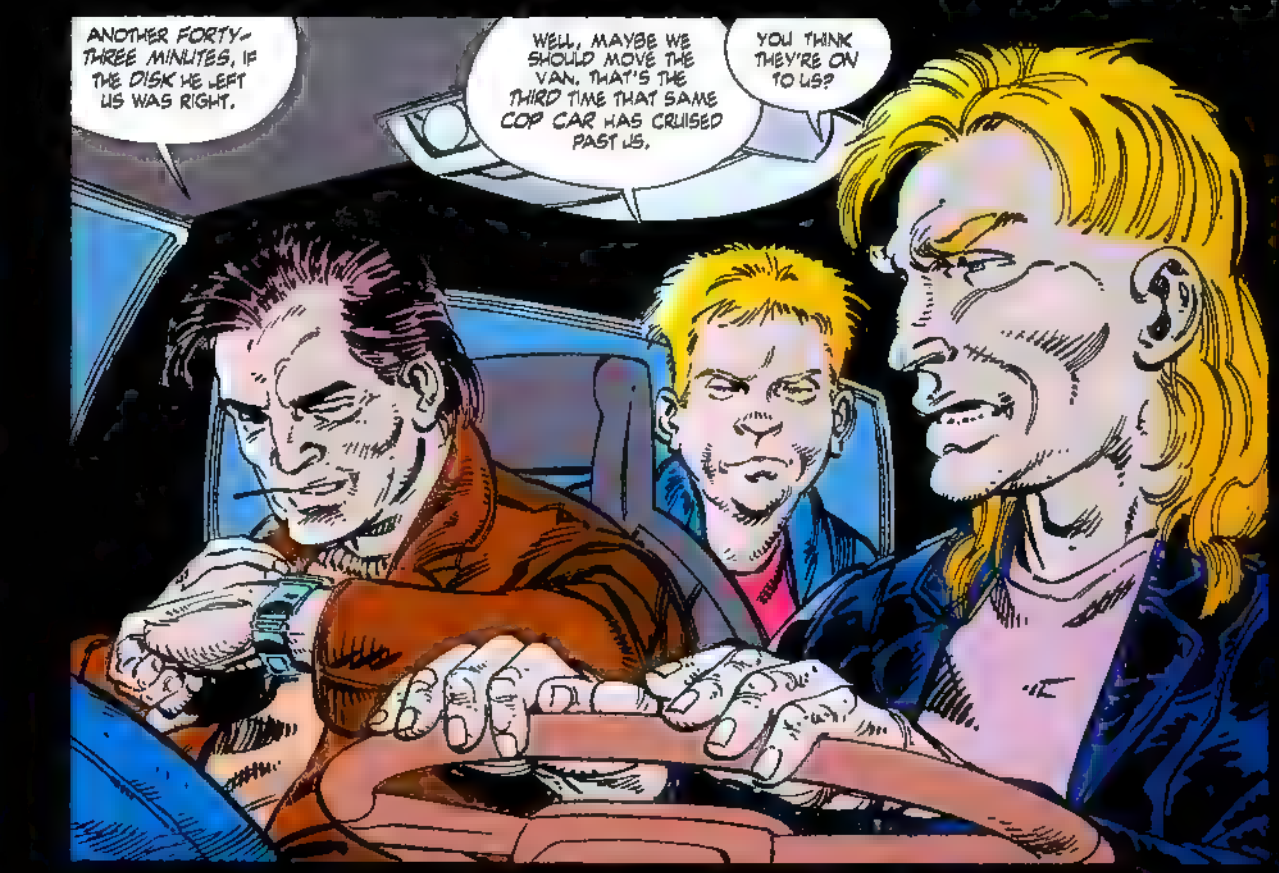
THIS IS ABOUT SAVING THE LIFE OF MAYBE THE GREATEST PRESIDENT THIS COUNTRY IS EVER GONNA HAVE!
SAVING HIM FROM YOU!
TOMMY IS FROM THE FUTURE, AND HE KNOWS ALL ABOUT YOUR DIRTY SCHEME TO ASSASSINATE PRESIDENT HILLTOP.
ASSASSINATE..?


LISTEN... I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU THINK WE ARE, BUT YOU COULDN'T BE FARTHER FROM THE TRUTH.
OH, SURE! AND WHY WOULD HE DO THAT? WHY WOULD HE HELP A BUNCH OF MURDERING FREAKS..?
WE CAME TO WASHINGTON TO ASK THE PRESIDENT TO HELP US!
BECAUSE, JANEY...

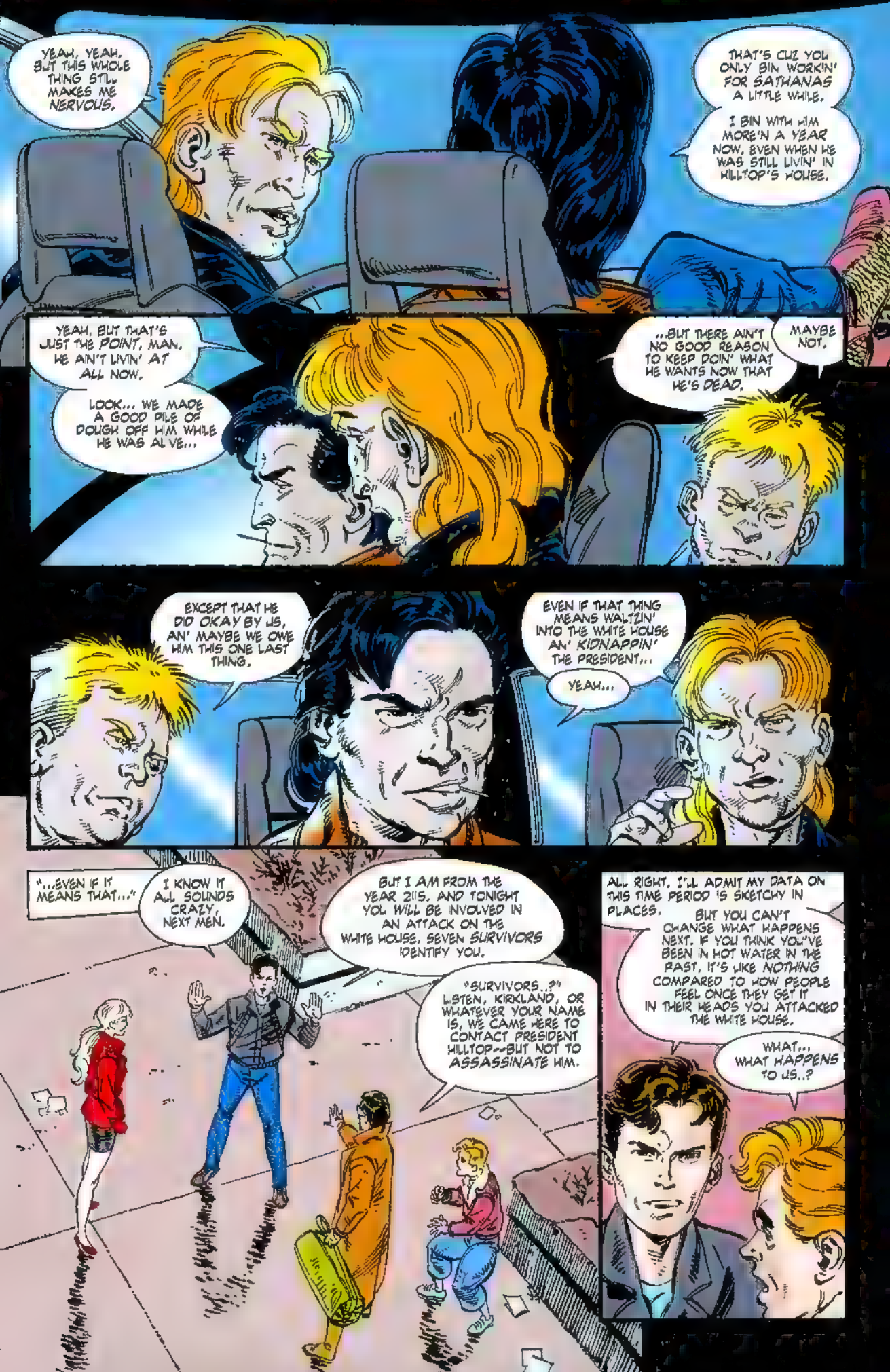
...I'M AFRAID I HAVEN'T BEEN ENTIRELY STRAIGHT WITH YOU.

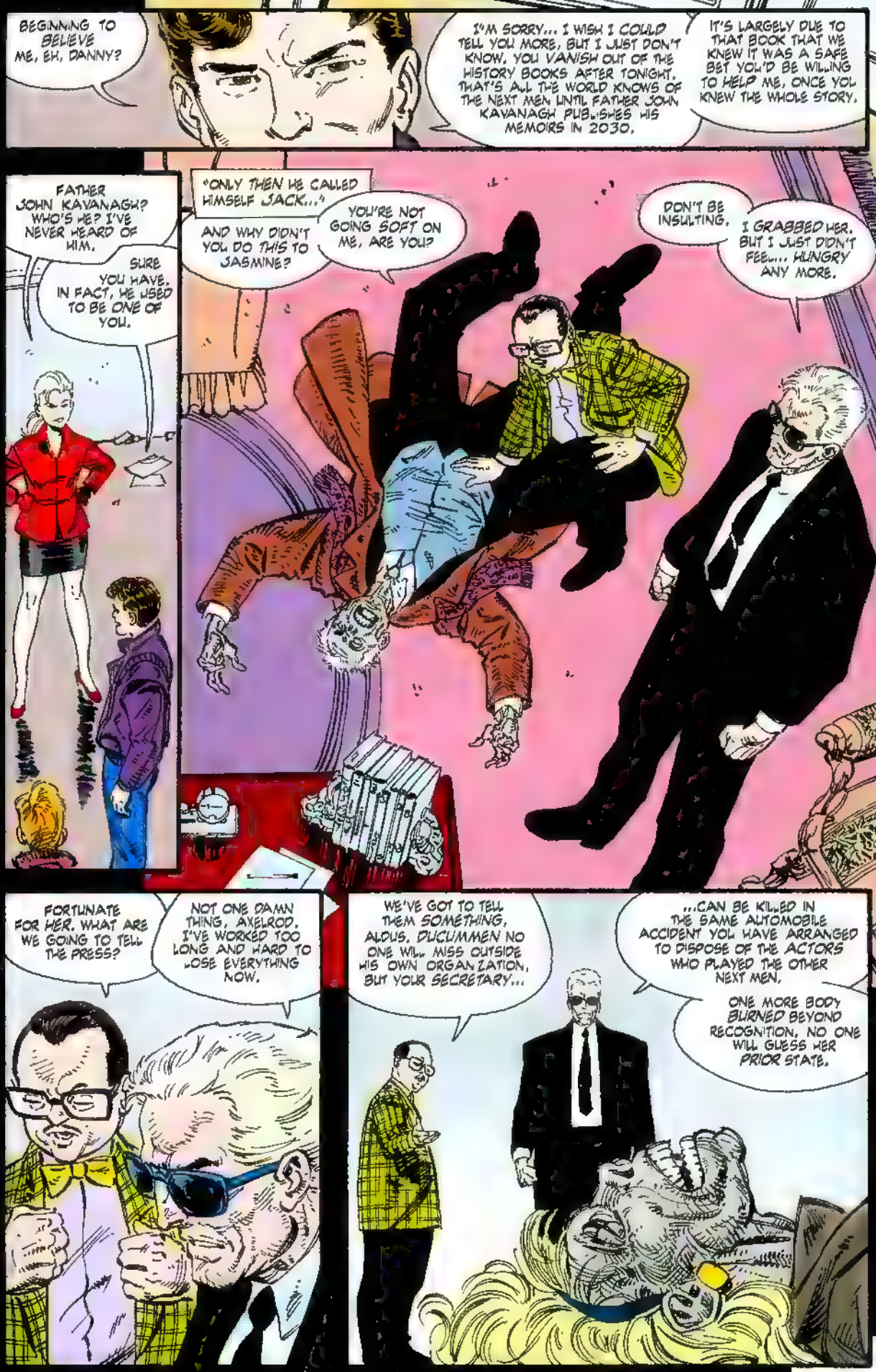
SHE'LL BE SAFE HERE UNTIL SHE COMES TO.
WHAT IS ALL THIS? WHAT KIND OF RABBIT HOLE HAVE WE FALLEN INTO?
I'M SURPRISED YOU KNOW THAT REFERENCE. YOUR EDUCATION REALLY WAS QUITE EXTENSIVE, WASN'T IT?
SATHANAS WANTED HIS FIRST MUTATES TO BE WELL ROUNDED.
IF THAT'S SOME KIND OF PUN YOU'RE PLAYING TO THE WRONG AUDIENCE, FRIEND. NOW... IF YOU KNOW AS MUCH ABOUT US AS YOU SEEM TO...
...YOU KNOW WHATEVER POPGUNS YOU MIGHT HAVE IN THAT BAG WON'T WORK ON ME.
SO START TALKING BEFORE I HAND YOU YOUR HEART.
THAT'S THE SPIRIT!
ALL RIGHT, NEXT MEN. I'LL TELL YOU THE TRUTH I KEPT FROM JANEY.
THERE WILL BE AN ATTEMPT ON THE LIFE OF PRESIDENT HILLTOP TONIGHT. AND YOU THREE WILL BE INVOLVED IN IT. BUT I HAVEN'T COME BACK THROUGH TIME TO PREVENT IT.
I'VE COME TO MAKE SURE IT SUCCEEDS.

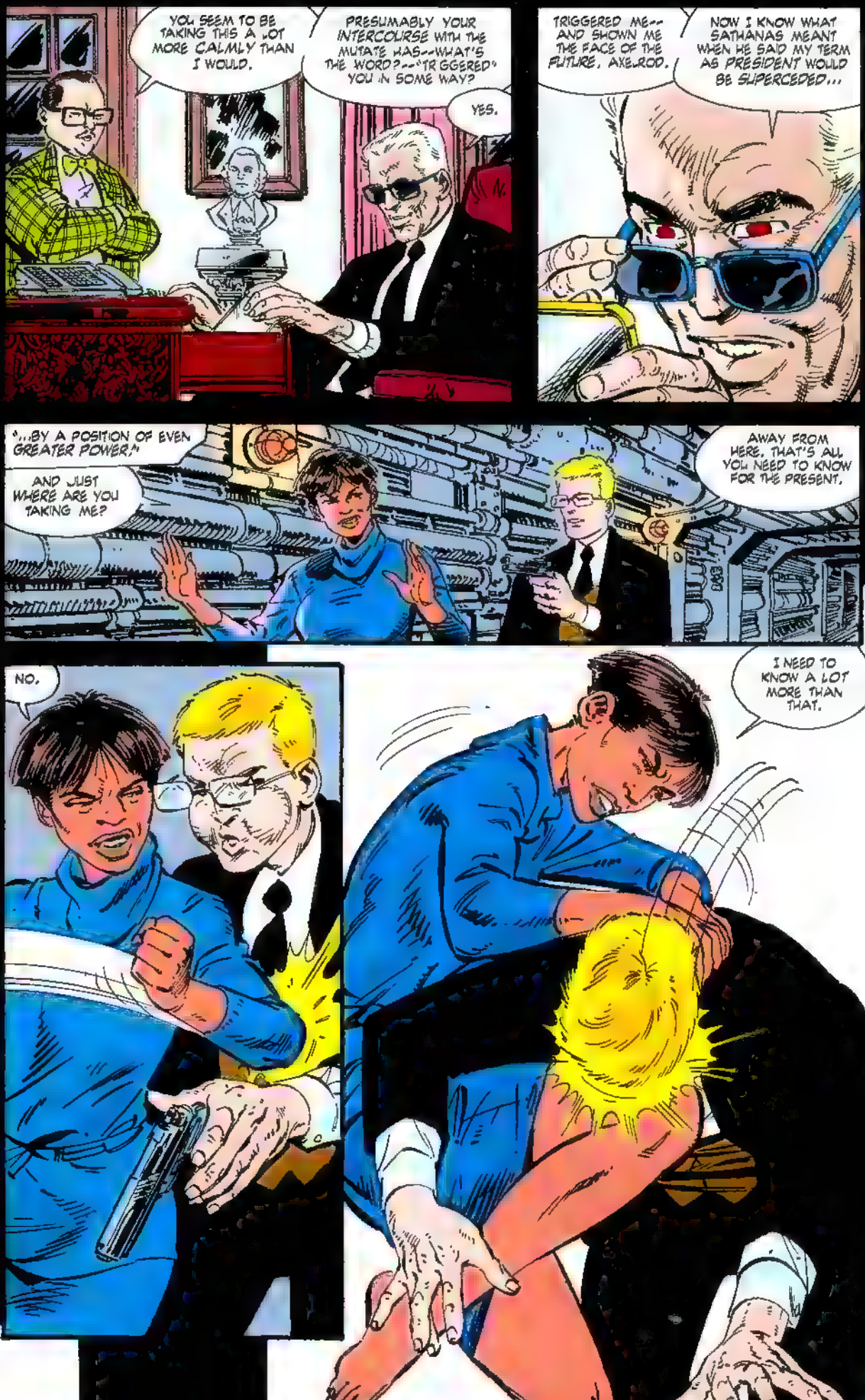
History never embraces more than a small part of reality.
La Rochefoucauld
1613 - 1680


ANOTHER FORTY-THREE MINUTES, IF THE DISK WE LEFT US WAS RIGHT.
WELL, MAYBE WE SHOULD MOVE THE VAN. THAT'S THE THIRD TIME THAT SAME COP CAR HAS CRUISED PAST US.
YOU THINK THEY'RE ON TO US?

ON TO WHAT?
WE GOT NO WEAPONS ON US. WE GOT NOTHING ON PAPER TO SAY WHY WE'RE HERE.
AN' WE BEEN AN HOUR AN' TEN MINUTES IN A TWO-HOUR PARKING ZONE.

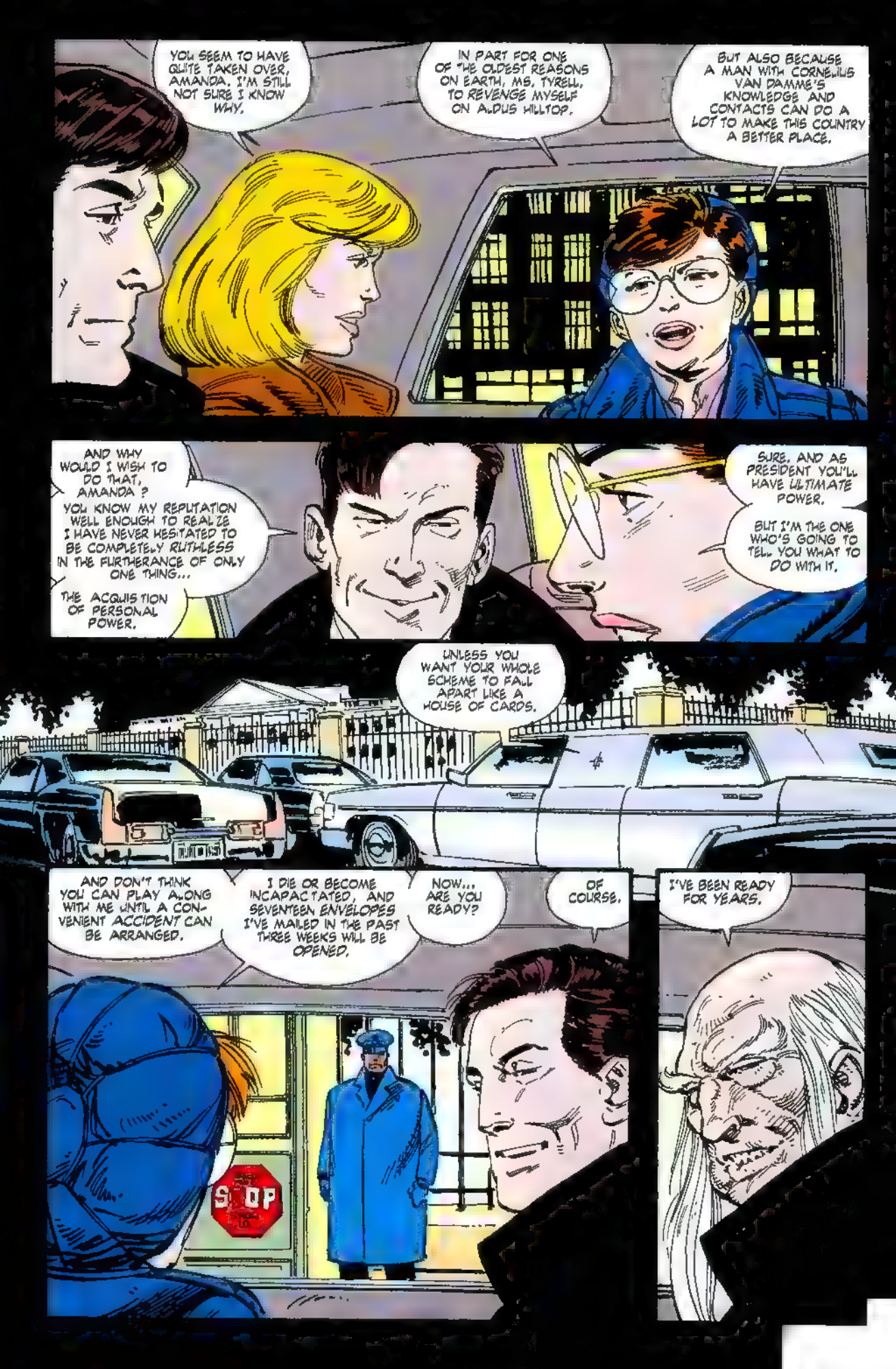

YEAH, YEAH, BUT THIS WHOLE THING STILL MAKES ME NERVOUS.
THAT'S CUZ YOU ONLY BIN WORKIN' FOR SATHANAS A LITTLE WHILE.
I BIN WITH HIM MORE'N A YEAR NOW, EVEN WHEN HE WAS STILL LIVIN' IN HILLTOP'S HOUSE.
YEAH, BUT THAT'S JUST THE POINT, MAN. HE AIN'T LIVIN' AT ALL NOW.
LOOK... WE MADE A GOOD PILE OF DOUGH OFF HIM WHILE HE WAS ALIVE...
...BUT THERE AIN'T NO GOOD REASON TO KEEP DOIN' WHAT HE WANTS NOW THAT HE'S DEAD.
MAYBE NOT.
EXCEPT THAT HE DID OKAY BY US, AN' MAYBE WE OWE HIM THIS ONE LAST THING.
EVEN IF THAT THING MEANS WALTZIN' INTO THE WHITE HOUSE AN' KIDNAPPIN' THE PRESIDENT...
YEAH...
"...EVEN IF IT MEANS THAT..."
I KNOW IT ALL SOUNDS CRAZY, NEXT MEN.
BUT I AM FROM THE YEAR 2115, AND TONIGHT YOU WILL BE INVOLVED IN AN ATTACK ON THE WHITE HOUSE. SEVEN SURVIVORS IDENTIFY YOU.
"SURVIVORS..?" LISTEN, KIRKLAND, OR WHATEVER YOUR NAME IS, WE CAME HERE TO CONTACT PRESIDENT HILLTOP--BUT NOT TO ASSASSINATE HIM.
ALL RIGHT. I'LL ADMIT MY DATA ON THIS TIME PERIOD IS SKETCHY IN PLACES.
BUT YOU CAN'T CHANGE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. IF YOU THINK YOU'VE BEEN IN HOT WATER IN THE PAST, IT'S LIKE NOTHING COMPARED TO HOW PEOPLE FEEL ONCE THEY GET IT IN THEIR HEADS YOU ATTACKED THE WHITE HOUSE.
WHAT... WHAT HAPPENS TO US..?

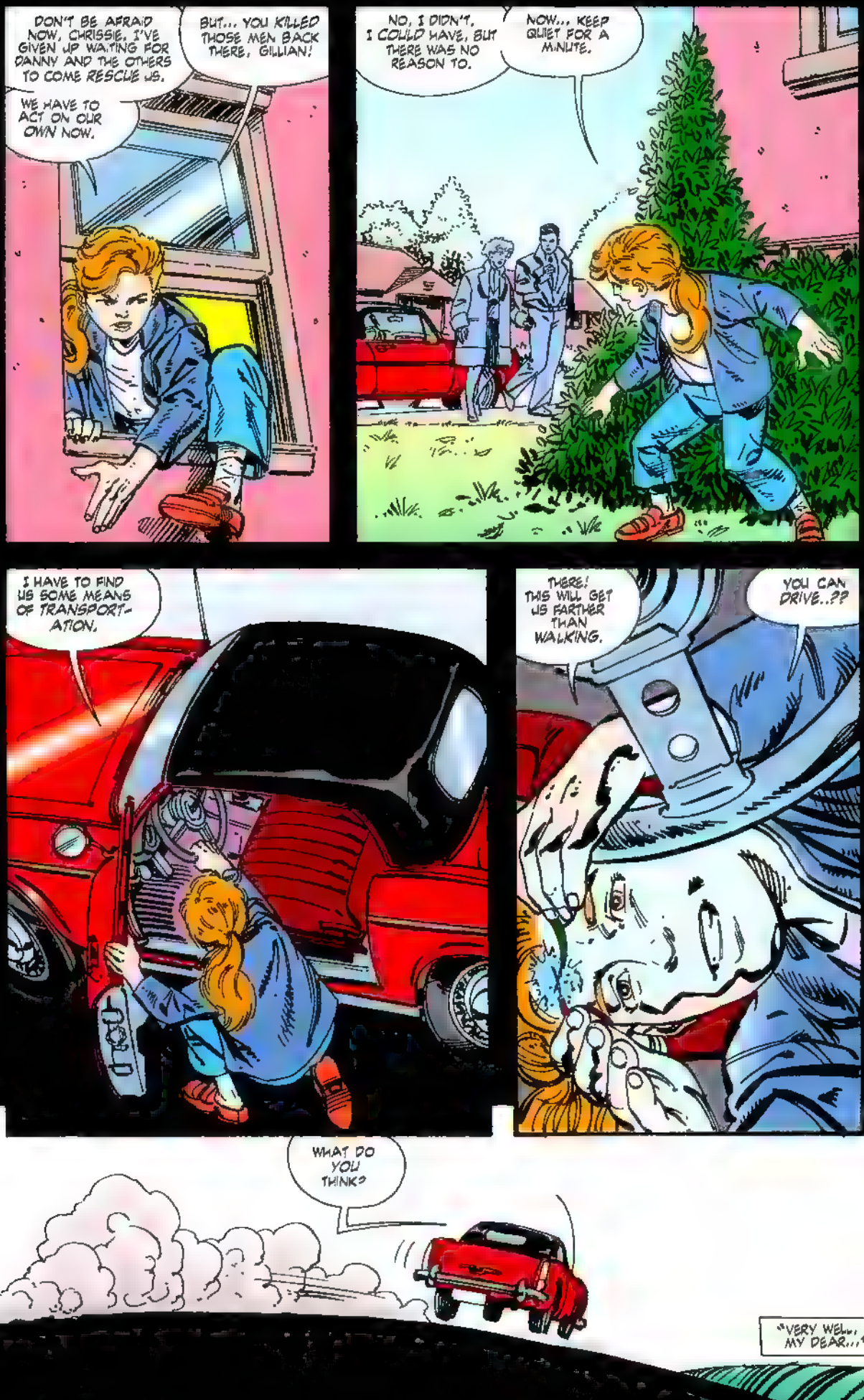

BEGINNING TO BELIEVE ME, EH, DANNY?
I'M SORRY... I WISH I COULD TELL YOU MORE, BUT I JUST DON'T KNOW. YOU VANISH OUT OF THE HISTORY BOOKS AFTER TONIGHT. THAT'S ALL THE WORLD KNOWS OF THE NEXT MEN UNTIL FATHER JOHN KAVANAGH PUBLISHES HIS MEMOIRS IN 2030.
IT'S LARGELY DUE TO THAT BOOK THAT WE KNEW IT WAS A SAFE BET YOU'D BE WILLING TO HELP ME, ONCE YOU KNEW THE WHOLE STORY.
FATHER JOHN KAVANAGH? WHO'S HE? I'VE NEVER HEARD OF HIM.
SURE YOU HAVE. IN FACT, HE USED TO BE ONE OF YOU.
"ONLY THEN HE CALLED HIMSELF JACK..."
AND WHY DIDN'T YOU DO THIS TO JASMINE?
YOU'RE NOT GOING SOFT ON ME, ARE YOU?
DON'T BE INSULTING.
I GRABBED HER. BUT I JUST DIDN'T FEE... HUNGRY ANY MORE.
FORTUNATE FOR HER. WHAT ARE WE GOING TO TELL THE PRESS?
NOT ONE DAMN THING, AXELROD. I'VE WORKED TOO LONG AND HARD TO LOSE EVERYTHING NOW.
WE'VE GOT TO TELL THEM SOMETHING, ALDUS, DUCUMMEN NO ONE WILL MISS OUTSIDE HIS OWN ORGANIZATION, BUT YOUR SECRETARY...
...CAN BE KILLED IN THE SAME AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT YOU HAVE ARRANGED TO DISPOSE OF THE ACTORS WHO PLAYED THE OTHER NEXT MEN.
ONE MORE BODY BURNED BEYOND RECOGNITION. NO ONE WILL GUESS HER PRIOR STATE.


YOU SEEM TO BE TAKING THIS A LOT MORE CALMLY THAN I WOULD.
PRESUMABLY YOUR INTERCOURSE WITH THE MUTATE WAS--WHAT'S THE WORD?--"TRIGGERED" YOU IN SOME WAY?
YES.
TRIGGERED ME--AND SHOWN ME THE FACE OF THE FUTURE, AXELROD.
NOW I KNOW WHAT SATHANAS MEANT WHEN HE SAID MY TERM AS PRESIDENT WOULD BE SUPERCEDED...
"...BY A POSITION OF EVEN GREATER POWER!"
AND JUST WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?
AWAY FROM HERE. THAT'S ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW FOR THE PRESENT.
NO.
I NEED TO KNOW A LOT MORE THAN THAT.

NOW... START TALKING. BEGIN WITH JASMINE. WHERE IS SHE?
>GULK!< DON'T KNOW.
ONLY FLUKE I WAS ABLE TO FIND YOU.
BAD START, BUT I'LL GIVE YOU A MINUTE OR SO TO IMPROVE YOUR STORY.
HOW DID YOU TRACK US FROM THE HOSPITAL?
WHOLE ESCAPE WAS ARRANGED. HILLTOP WANTED YOU TO GET DESOTO AWAY SO HE COULD GRAB HER.
HILLTOP, OF COURSE. HE'S BEEN UP TO HIS NOSE IN THIS FROM THE VERY START. I HAD THE DISTINCT PLEASURE OF KICKING HIM IN THE BALLS ONCE, NOT SO LONG AGO.
I WISH I'D KILLED HIM, BUT I WAS ON MY BEST BEHAVIOR.
SO, WHERE'S JASMINE?
LIKE I SAID-- I DON'T KNOW. LOOK... I REALLY AM TRYING TO HELP YOU.
THERE'S SOMETHING BAD GOING DOWN. I KNEW THE MINUTE HILLTOP CALLED IN AXELROD...
AXEL-ROD?

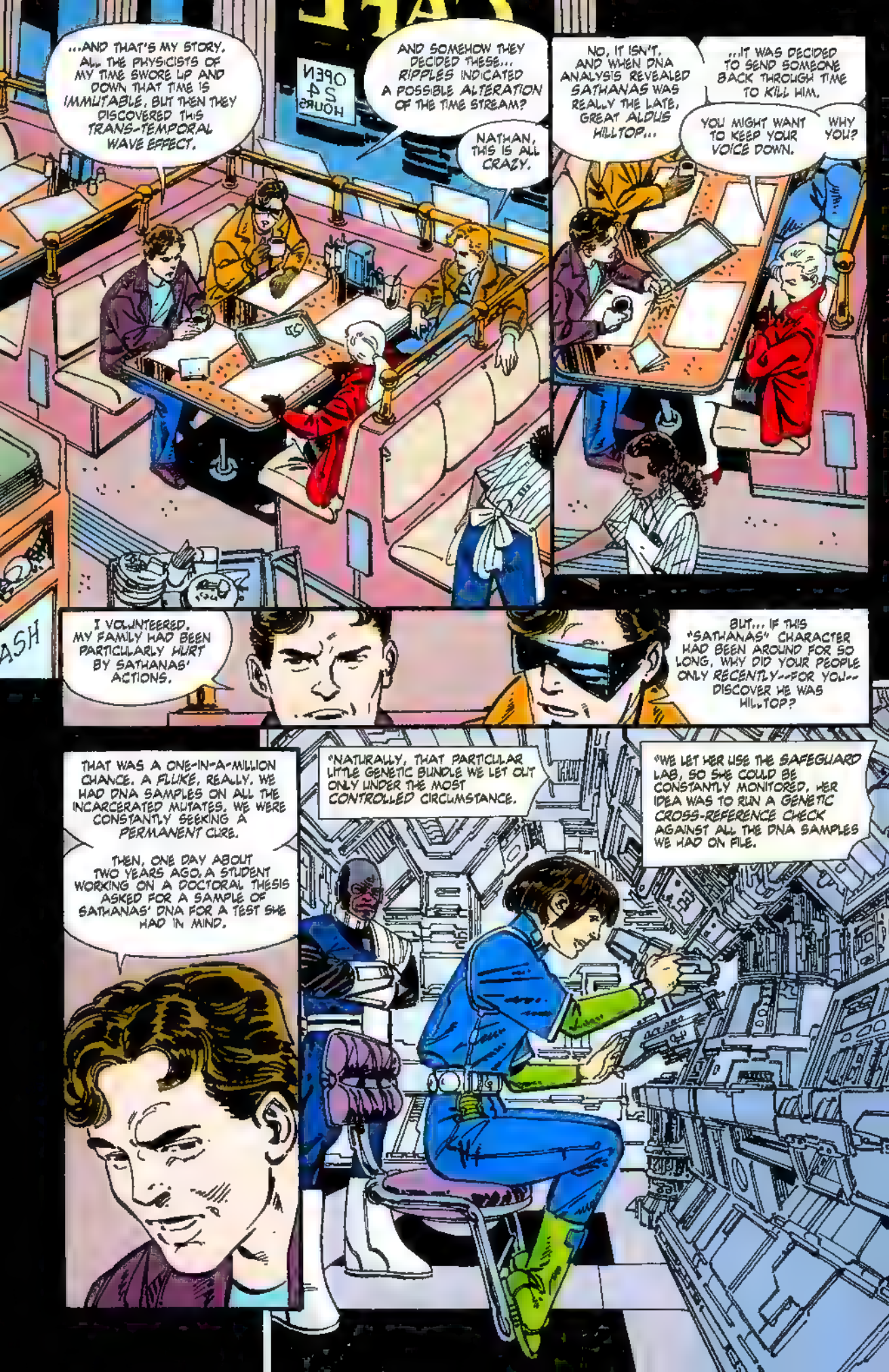
JESUS! IF HILLTOP HAS LET THAT SICK BASTARD ANYWHERE NEAR JAZZ...
EXACTLY. NOW, WILL YOU TRUST ME FOR FIVE MINUTES? LONG ENOUGH TO GET US BOTH OUT OF HERE?
FIVE MINUTES.
"BUT I KEEP THE GUN."
WE'RE GOING TO BE LATE.
WASHINGTON TRAFFIC IS NEVER GOOD. WE'LL GET THERE.
I'M STILL NOT SURE HOW THIS IS GOING TO WORK.
OH, IT WILL WORK. ALL WE NEED IS A MINUTE ALONE WITH THAT BASTARD.

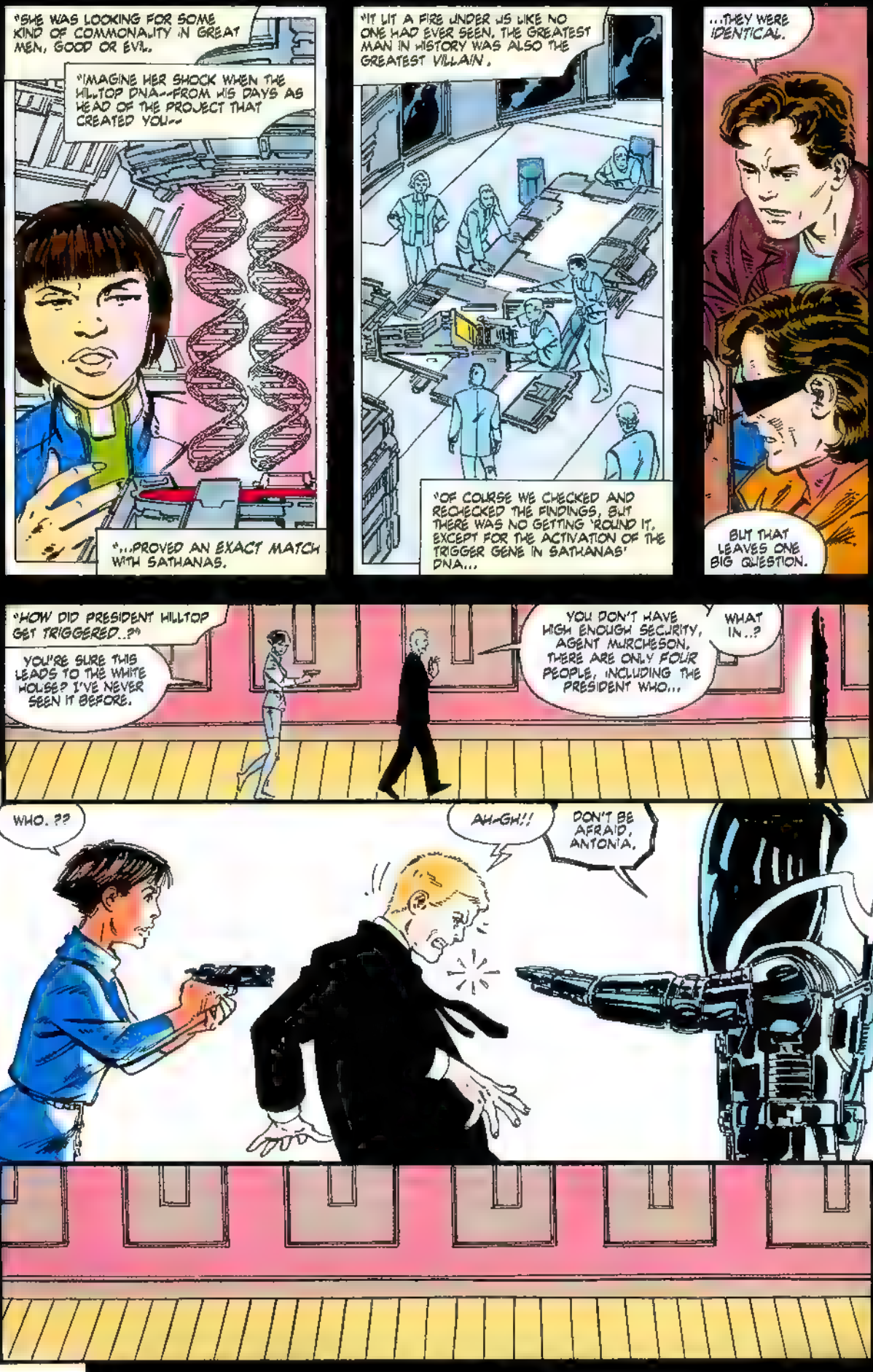

YOU SEEM TO HAVE QUITE TAKEN OVER, AMANDA. I'M STILL NOT SURE I KNOW WHY.
IN PART FOR ONE OF THE OLDEST REASONS ON EARTH, MS. TYRELL, TO REVENGE MYSELF ON ALDUS HILLTOP.
BUT ALSO BECAUSE A MAN WITH CORNELIUS VAN DAMME'S KNOWLEDGE AND CONTACTS CAN DO A LOT TO MAKE THIS COUNTRY A BETTER PLACE.
AND WHY WOULD I WISH TO DO THAT, AMANDA ? YOU KNOW MY REPUTATION WELL ENOUGH TO REALIZE I HAVE NEVER HESITATED TO BE COMPLETELY RUTHLESS IN THE FURTHERANCE OF ONLY ONE THING...
THE ACQUISITION OF PERSONAL POWER.
SURE. AND AS PRESIDENT YOU'LL HAVE ULTIMATE POWER.
BUT I'M THE ONE WHO'S GOING TO TELL YOU WHAT TO DO WITH IT.
UNLESS YOU WANT YOUR WHOLE SCHEME TO FALL APART LIKE A HOUSE OF CARDS.
AND DON'T THINK YOU CAN PLAY ALONG WITH ME UNTIL A CONVENIENT ACCIDENT CAN BE ARRANGED.
I DIE OR BECOME INCAPACITATED, AND SEVENTEEN ENVELOPES I'VE MAILED IN THE PAST THREE WEEKS WILL BE OPENED.
NOW... ARE YOU READY?
OF COURSE.
I'VE BEEN READY FOR YEARS.
STOP

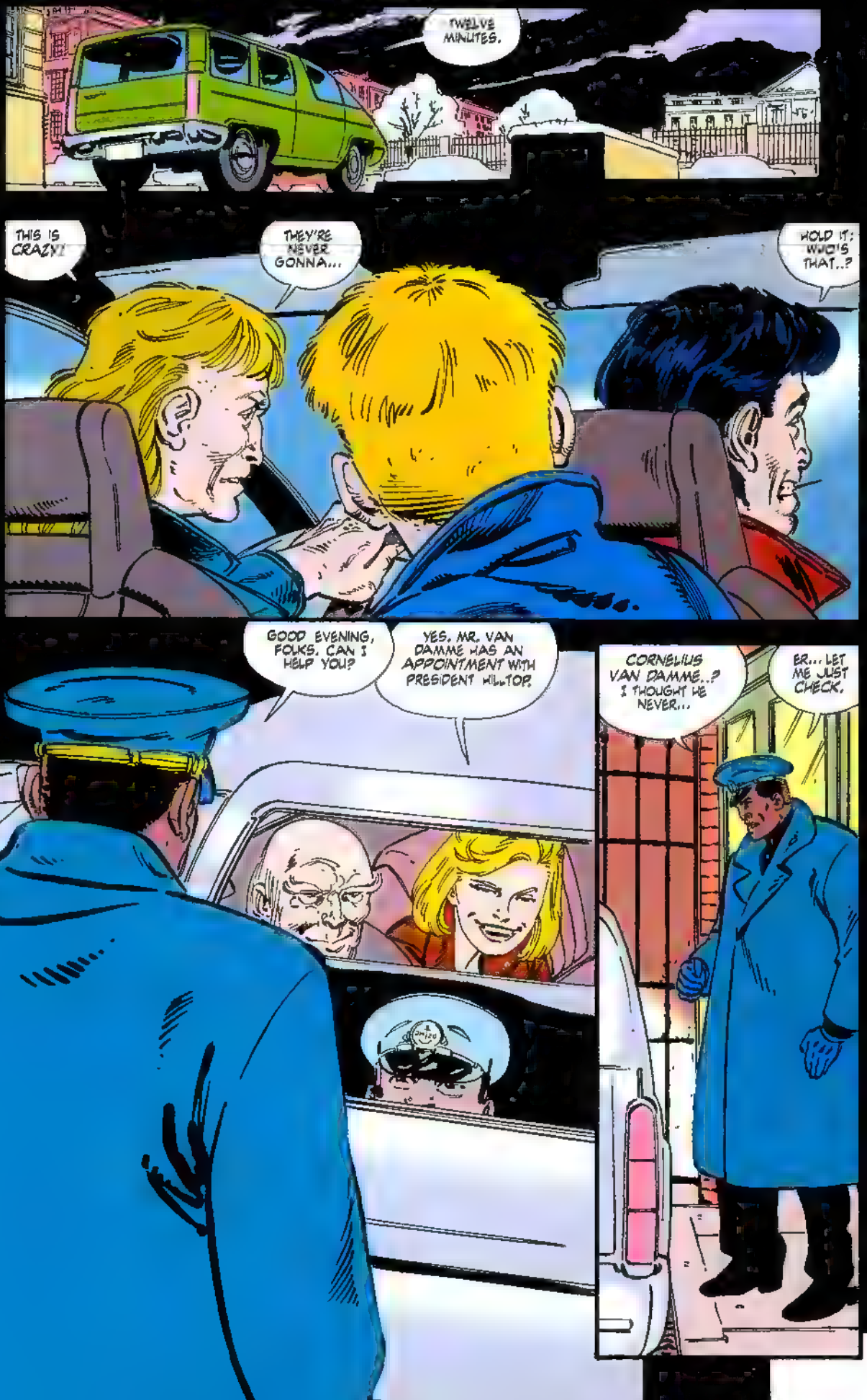

DON'T BE AFRAID NOW, CHRISSIE. I'VE GIVEN UP WAITING FOR DANNY AND THE OTHERS TO COME RESCUE US.
BUT... YOU KILLED THOSE MEN BACK THERE, GILLIAN!
WE HAVE TO ACT ON OUR OWN NOW.
NO, I DIDN'T. I COULD HAVE, BUT THERE WAS NO REASON TO.
NOW... KEEP QUIET FOR A MINUTE.
I HAVE TO FIND US SOME MEANS OF TRANSPORT-ATION.
THERE! THIS WILL GET US FARTHER THAN WALKING.
YOU CAN DRIVE..??
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
"VERY WELL, MY DEAR..."

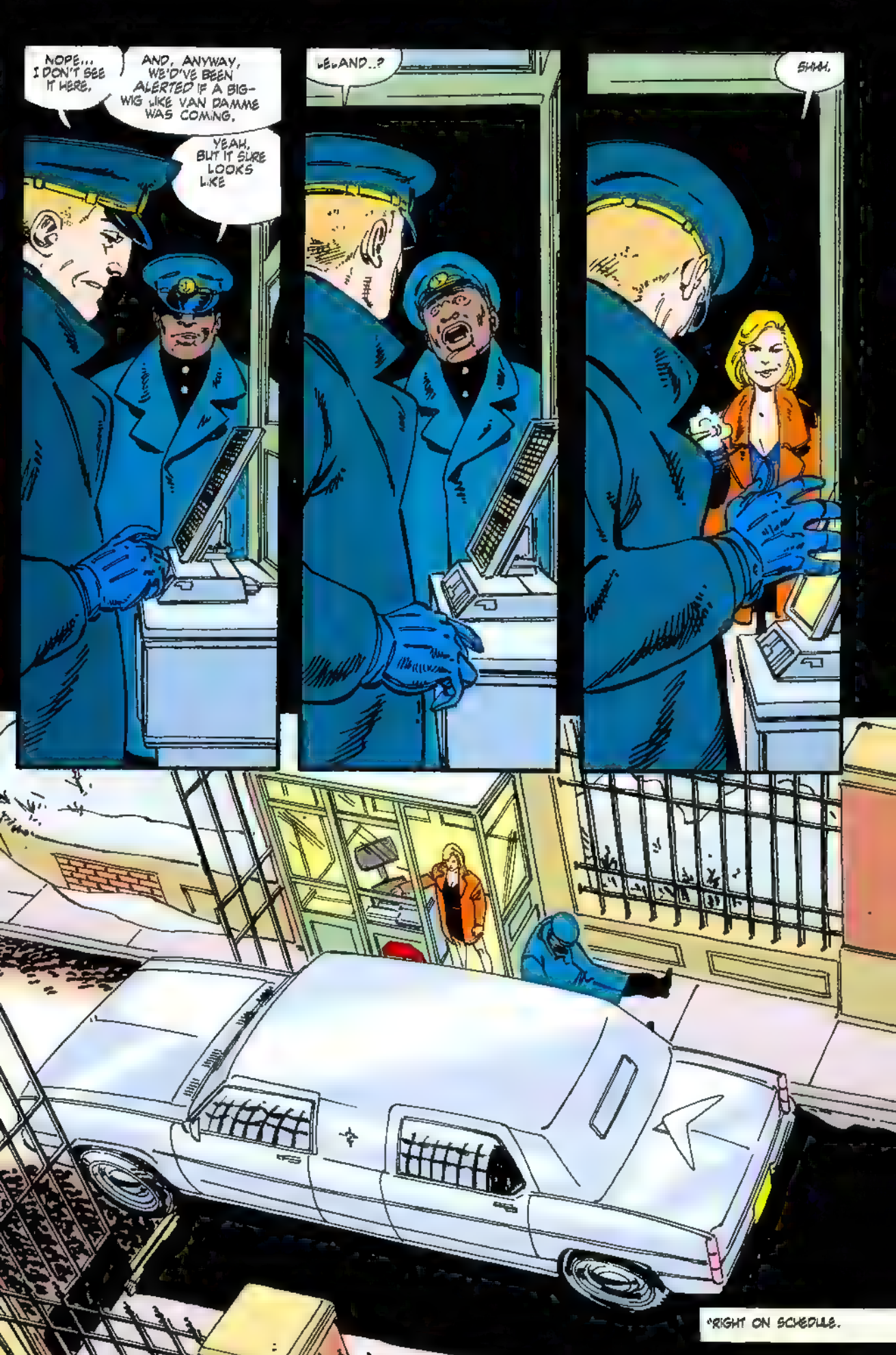
WHAT DO YOU WANT?
TSK TSK. SUCH A TONE OF VOICE TO USE TO YOUR OWN FATHER!
IS THAT SARCASM, DR. AXELROD? SURELY YOU DON'T THINK I STILL BELIEVE YOUR LIES?
NOT AT ALL, NOT AT ALL.
I'M AFRAID WE HAVE NO FURTHER USE FOR YOU, CHILD. AND THIS VERY SAME DRUG WHICH MUDDLED YOUR THINKING AND MADE YOUR MUSCLES TOO WEAK TO PERFORM YOUR USUAL ACROBATICS...
...WHEN ADMINISTERED IN A DOSE SEVERAL TIMES GREATER THAN WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN RECEIVING...
...WILL CAUSE A QUICK, IF RATHER PAINFUL...
HUHRK!!
YOU'RE A LITTLE LATE WITH THAT, DOCTOR.

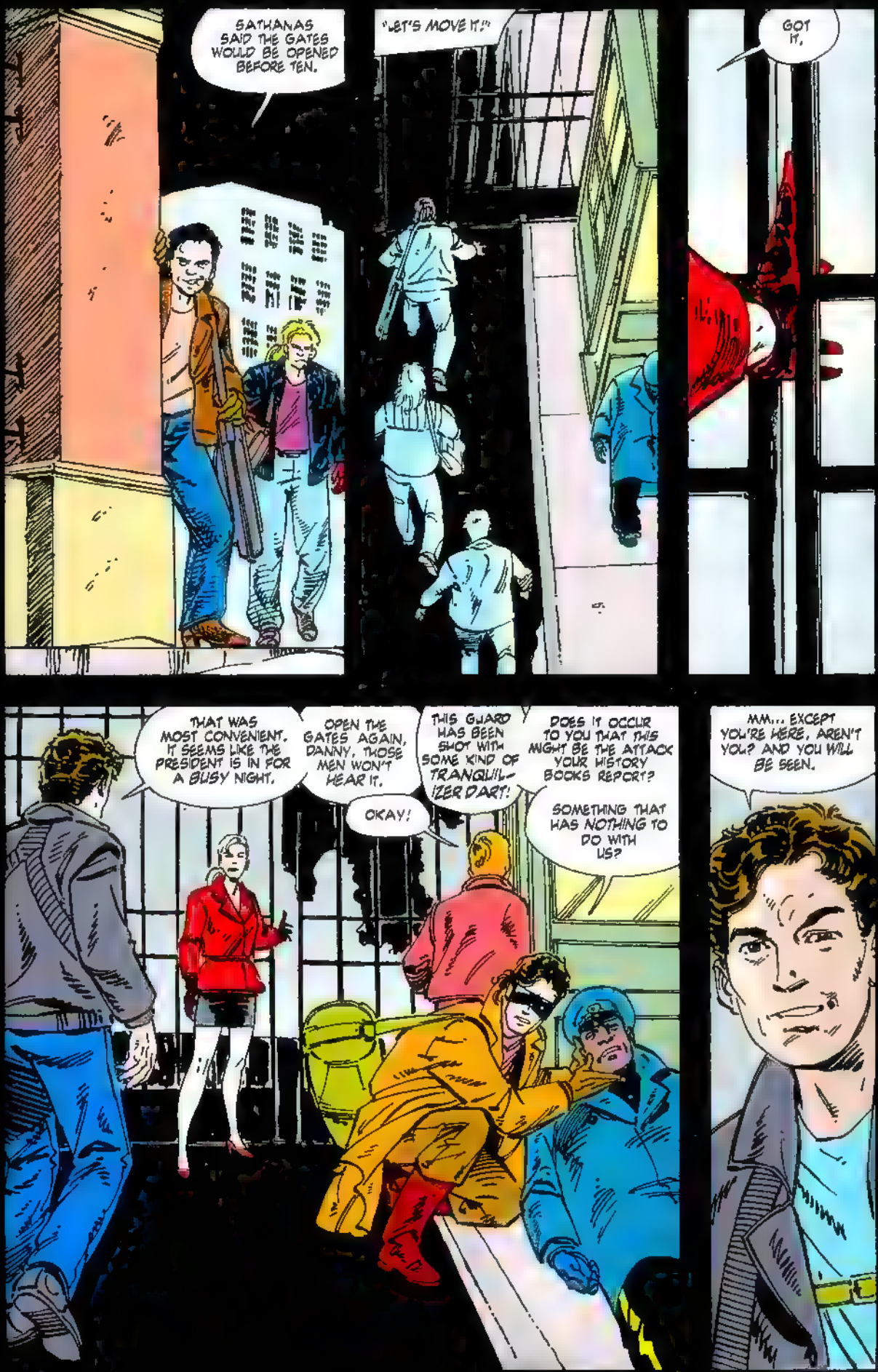
YOU SEEM TO BE FASCINATED WITH DETAILS, DOCTOR. SHALL I TELL YOU WHAT I'VE DONE TO YOU, CLEANLY AND CLINICALLY?
YOUR LOWER JAW IS SHATTERED. SPIKES OF BONE HAVE TORN UP THE FLESH AND CARTILAGE OF YOUR THROAT.
IT SHOULD TAKE YOU ABOUT SIX MINUTES TO DROWN IN YOUR OWN BLOOD.
JASMINE...
WHAT..?!?
DON'T BE AFRAID, JASMINE.
THERE IS NOTHING FOR YOU TO BE AFRAID OF.
NOT YET.

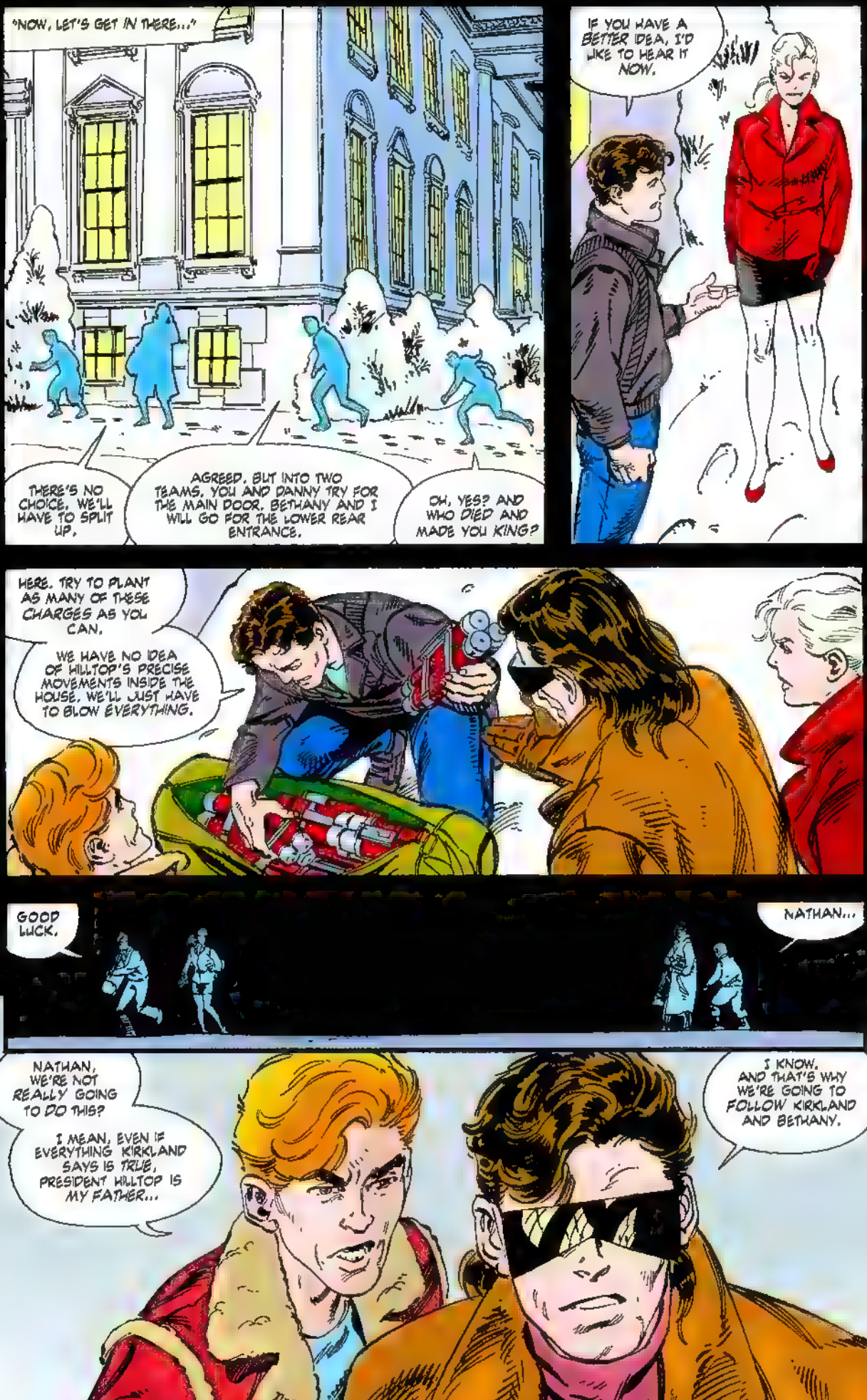

...AND THAT'S MY STORY. ALL THE PHYSICISTS OF MY TIME SWORE UP AND DOWN THAT TIME IS IMMUTABLE. BUT THEN THEY DISCOVERED THIS TRANS-TEMPORAL WAVE EFFECT.
AND SOMEHOW THEY DECIDED THESE... RIPPLES INDICATED A POSSIBLE ALTERATION OF THE TIME STREAM?
NATHAN, THIS IS ALL CRAZY.
NO, IT ISN'T. AND WHEN DNA ANALYSIS REVEALED SATHANAS WAS REALLY THE LATE, GREAT ALDUS HILLTOP...
...IT WAS DECIDED TO SEND SOMEONE BACK THROUGH TIME TO KILL HIM.
YOU MIGHT WANT TO KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN.
WHY YOU?
I VOLUNTEERED. MY FAMILY HAD BEEN PARTICULARLY HURT BY SATHANAS' ACTIONS.
BUT... IF THIS "SATHANAS" CHARACTER HAD BEEN AROUND FOR SO LONG, WHY DID YOUR PEOPLE ONLY RECENTLY--FOR YOU--DISCOVER HE WAS HILLTOP?
THAT WAS A ONE-IN-A-MILLION CHANCE. A FLUKE, REALLY. WE HAD DNA SAMPLES ON ALL THE INCARCERATED MUTATES. WE WERE CONSTANTLY SEEKING A PERMANENT CURE.
THEN, ONE DAY ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO, A STUDENT WORKING ON A DOCTORAL THESIS ASKED FOR A SAMPLE OF SATHANAS' DNA FOR A TEST SHE HAD IN MIND.
"NATURALLY, THAT PARTICULAR LITTLE GENETIC BUNDLE WE LET OUT ONLY UNDER THE MOST CONTROLLED CIRCUMSTANCE.
"WE LET HER USE THE SAFEGUARD LAB, SO SHE COULD BE CONSTANTLY MONITORED. HER IDEA WAS TO RUN A GENETIC CROSS-REFERENCE CHECK AGAINST ALL THE DNA SAMPLES WE HAD ON FILE.


"SHE WAS LOOKING FOR SOME KIND OF COMMONALITY IN GREAT MEN, GOOD OR EVIL.
"IMAGINE HER SHOCK WHEN THE HILLTOP DNA--FROM HIS DAYS AS HEAD OF THE PROJECT THAT CREATED YOU--
"...PROVED AN EXACT MATCH WITH SATHANAS.
"IT LIT A FIRE UNDER US LIKE NO ONE HAD EVER SEEN. THE GREATEST MAN IN HISTORY WAS ALSO THE GREATEST VILLAIN.
"OF COURSE WE CHECKED AND RECHECKED THE FINDINGS, BUT THERE WAS NO GETTING 'ROUND IT, EXCEPT FOR THE ACTIVATION OF THE TRIGGER GENE IN SATHANAS' DNA...
...THEY WERE IDENTICAL.
BUT THAT LEAVES ONE BIG QUESTION.
"HOW DID PRESIDENT HILLTOP GET TRIGGERED..?"
YOU'RE SURE THIS LEADS TO THE WHITE HOUSE? I'VE NEVER SEEN IT BEFORE.
YOU DON'T HAVE HIGH ENOUGH SECURITY, AGENT MURCHESON. THERE ARE ONLY FOUR PEOPLE, INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT WHO...
WHAT IN..?
WHO..??
AH-GH!!
DON'T BE AFRAID, ANTONIA.


TWELVE MINUTES.
THIS IS CRAZY!
THEY'RE NEVER GONNA...
HOLD IT: WHO'S THAT..?
GOOD EVENING, FOLKS. CAN I HELP YOU?
YES. MR. VAN DAMME HAS AN APPOINTMENT WITH PRESIDENT HILLTOP.
CORNELIUS VAN DAMME..? I THOUGHT HE NEVER...
ER... LET ME JUST CHECK.

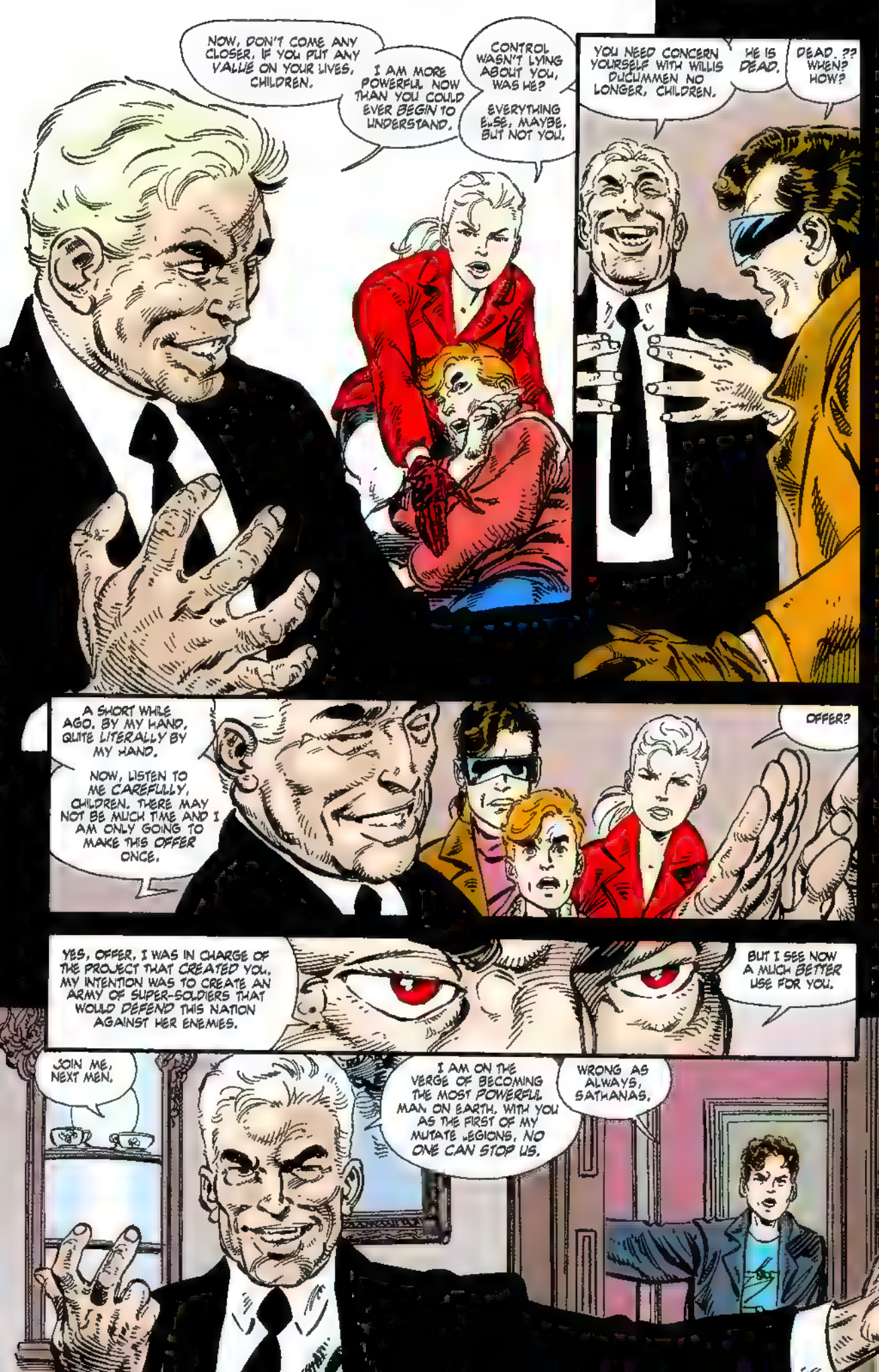

NOPE... I DON'T SEE IT HERE.
AND, ANYWAY, WE'D'VE BEEN ALERTED IF A BIG-WIG LIKE VAN DAMME WAS COMING.
YEAH, BUT IT SURE LOOKS LIKE
LELAND..?
SHHH.
*RIGHT ON SCHEDULE.


SATHANAS SAID THE GATES WOULD BE OPENED BEFORE TEN.
"LET'S MOVE IT!"
GOT IT.
THAT WAS MOST CONVENIENT. IT SEEMS LIKE THE PRESIDENT IS IN FOR A BUSY NIGHT.
OPEN THE GATES AGAIN, DANNY, THOSE MEN WON'T HEAR IT.
OKAY!
THIS GUARD HAS BEEN SHOT WITH SOME KIND OF TRANQUILIZER DART!
DOES IT OCCUR TO YOU THAT THIS MIGHT BE THE ATTACK YOUR HISTORY BOOKS REPORT?
SOMETHING THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH US?
MM... EXCEPT YOU'RE HERE, AREN'T YOU? AND YOU WILL BE SEEN.


"NOW, LET'S GET IN THERE..."
THERE'S NO CHOICE. WE'LL HAVE TO SPLIT UP.
AGREED. BUT INTO TWO TEAMS. YOU AND DANNY TRY FOR THE MAIN DOOR. BETHANY AND I WILL GO FOR THE LOWER REAR ENTRANCE.
OH, YES? AND WHO DIED AND MADE YOU KING?
IF YOU HAVE A BETTER IDEA, I'D LIKE TO HEAR IT NOW.
HERE. TRY TO PLANT AS MANY OF THESE CHARGES AS YOU CAN.
WE HAVE NO IDEA OF HILLTOP'S PRECISE MOVEMENTS INSIDE THE HOUSE. WE'LL JUST HAVE TO BLOW EVERYTHING.
GOOD LUCK.
NATHAN...
NATHAN, WE'RE NOT REALLY GOING TO DO THIS?
I MEAN, EVEN IF EVERYTHING KIRKLAND SAYS IS TRUE, PRESIDENT HILLTOP IS MY FATHER...
I KNOW. AND THAT'S WHY WE'RE GOING TO FOLLOW KIRKLAND AND BETHANY.

HERE... THIS OPENS INTO A SMALL ANTE-CHAMBER OFF THE MAIN DIPLOMATIC RECEPTION ROOM.
THERE SHOULDN'T BE ANYONE HERE AT THIS TIME OF...
WHAT THE...??
JANEY! SHE MUST HAVE COME 'ROUND SOONER THAN I PLANNED.
IF SHE DID SHE WOULD HAVE GONE STRAIGHT TO THE POLICE!
COME ON! WE'LL HAVE TO PLANT OUR CHARGES AS FAST AS WE CAN BE-FORE...
UNH!
UH UH.
NATHAN! DANNY! ARE YOU THERE?
RIGHT HERE.
NOW, WE HAVE TO MOVE FAST.

"THIS PLACE WILL BE SWARMING WITH SECURITY FORCES ANY MOMENT NOW!"
...HILLTOP!
THIS IS USELESS, NATHAN! THERE ARE TOO MANY ROOMS!
HILLTOP COULD BE IN ANY OF THEM!
THE NEXT MEN!
HOW CAN YOU BE HERE..??
NATHAN! HIS EYES! LOOK AT HIS EYES!
HE'S ALREADY BEEN TRIGGERED!
DANIEL? YOU'RE... DANIEL..?
YOU... YOU KNOW ABOUT ME?
YOU KNOW ABOUT ME??
OF COURSE I KNOW ABOUT YOU.
BUT YOU LET THEM USE ME IN THE PROJECT??
I BROUGHT YOU THERE.

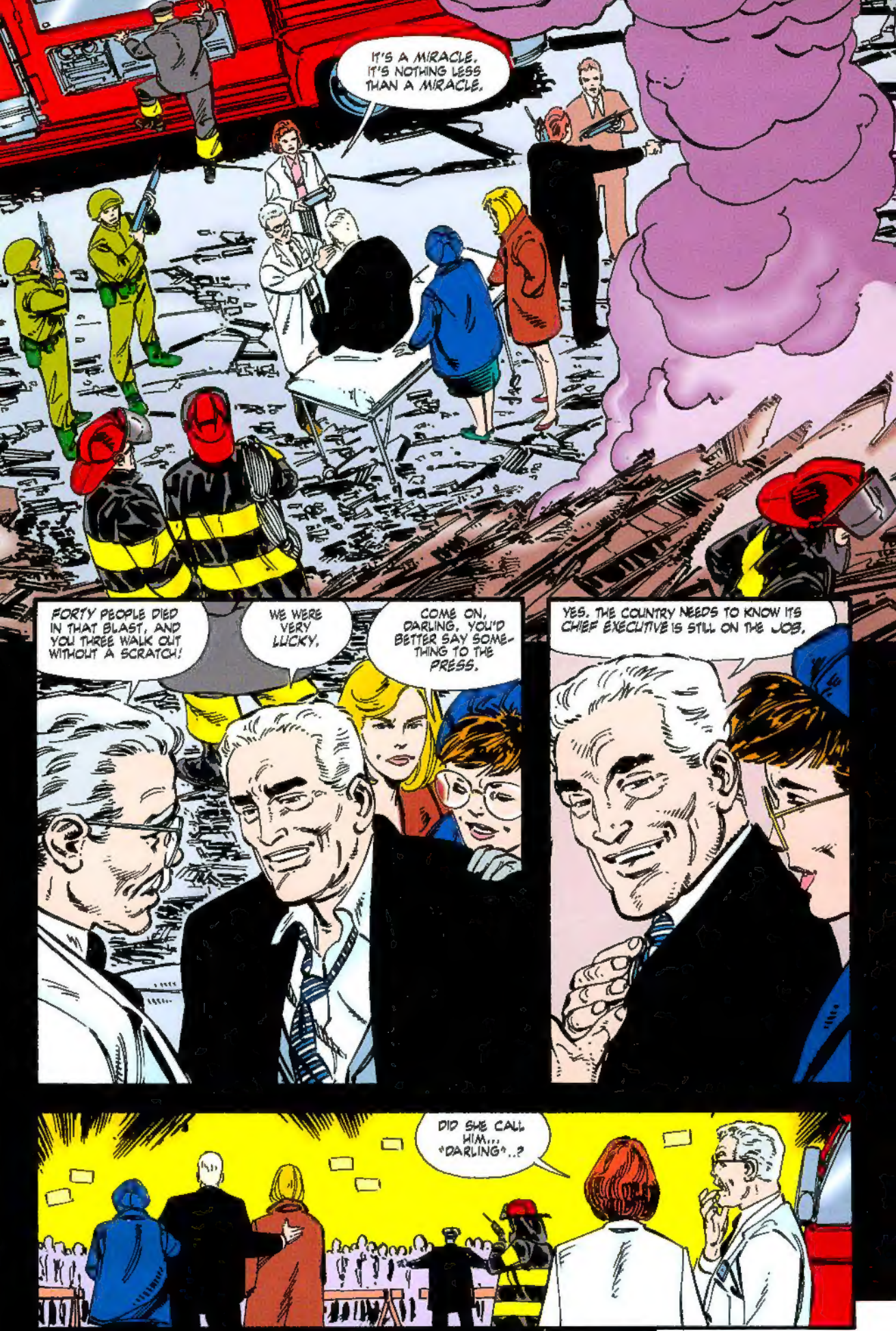

NOW, DON'T COME ANY CLOSER, IF YOU PUT ANY VALUE ON YOUR LIVES, CHILDREN.
I AM MORE POWERFUL NOW THAN YOU COULD EVER BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND.
CONTROL WASN'T LYING ABOUT YOU, WAS HE?
EVERYTHING ELSE, MAYBE. BUT NOT YOU.
YOU NEED CONCERN YOURSELF WITH WILLIS DUCUMMEN NO LONGER, CHILDREN.
HE IS DEAD.
DEAD. ?? WHEN? HOW?
A SHORT WHILE AGO. BY MY HAND, QUITE LITERALLY BY MY HAND.
NOW, LISTEN TO ME CAREFULLY, CHILDREN. THERE MAY NOT BE MUCH TIME AND I AM ONLY GOING TO MAKE THIS OFFER ONCE.
OFFER?
YES, OFFER. I WAS IN CHARGE OF THE PROJECT THAT CREATED YOU. MY INTENTION WAS TO CREATE AN ARMY OF SUPER-SOLDIERS THAT WOULD DEFEND THIS NATION AGAINST HER ENEMIES.
BUT I SEE NOW A MUCH BETTER USE FOR YOU.
JOIN ME, NEXT MEN.
I AM ON THE VERGE OF BECOMING THE MOST POWERFUL MAN ON EARTH. WITH YOU AS THE FIRST OF MY MUTATE LEGIONS. NO ONE CAN STOP US.
WRONG AS ALWAYS, SATHANAS.

WE WERE RIGHT. THIS IS WHERE IT ALL BEGINS.
AND NOW, THIS S WHERE IT ENDS.
NO, KIRKLAND. WE DIDN'T SPREAD THE EXPLOSIVES AROUND AS YOU WANTED. IF YOU DETONATE THEM, YOU'LL ONLY DO MINOR DAMAGE TO THE OUTSIDE OF THE BUILDING.
A CONTINGENCY WHICH DID NOT GO UNCONSIDERED, NATHAN.
BUT, AS YOU CAN SEE, I AM STILL IN A POSITION TO ACT.
AG-GH!
MISTER PRESIDENT! ARE YOU ALL...
...RIGHT .?
FOOLS...

JASMINE SURVIVED BECAUSE I WAS ALREADY SATED.
JASMINE..?
BUT I NEED MORE AND EVER MORE ENERGY.
WHAT..?!?
BETH!
NATHAN..?
IT'S ALL OVER, SATHANAS.
I REGRET THE DEATHS OF THESE INNOCENTS...

"...BUT THEY DIE TO SAVE TOMORROW..."

EPILOGUE...
MAN...
I THOUGHT THAT FIRE WAS NEVER GONNA GO OUT.
SHADDAP. AN' KEEP DOWN, THE BODY SHOULD BE RIGHT OVER HERE...
JESUS!
AWRIGHT, AWRIGHT! WE KNEW IT WASN'T GONNA BE PRETTY!
GET OUT THE BODY BAG.
RIGHT HERE.
MAN... WE CAN'T BE ALIVE STILL!
THERE'S NOTHIN' LEFT OF HIM!
THERE'S ENOUGH.
THERE'S ABOUT AS MUCH AS WE TOOK OUT OF THAT SUPER-SUIT, IN FACT...


IT'S A MIRACLE. IT'S NOTHING LESS THAN A MIRACLE.
FORTY PEOPLE DIED IN THAT BLAST, AND YOU THREE WALK OUT WITHOUT A SCRATCH!
WE WERE VERY LUCKY.
COME ON, DARLING, YOU'D BETTER SAY SOMETHING TO THE PRESS.
YES. THE COUNTRY NEEDS TO KNOW ITS CHIEF EXECUTIVE IS STILL ON THE JOB.
DID SHE CALL HIM... "DARLING"..?

NEVER THE END...

BIOGRAPHY

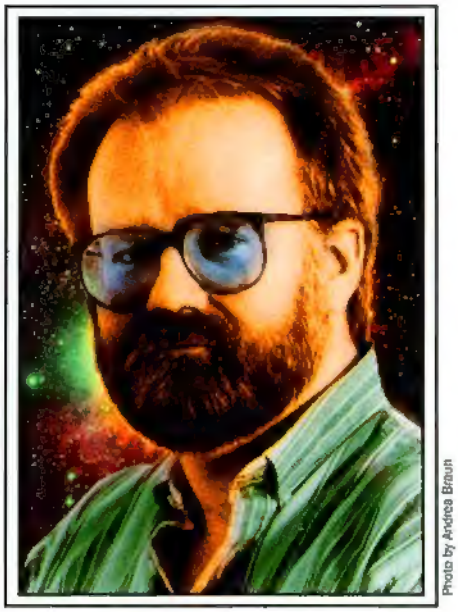


Photo by Andrea Braun

John Byrne has worked continuously in comics since 1975, following his first sale in late summer 1974. Beginning humbly enough, with the likes of *Wheelie and the Chopper Bunch* and *Doomsday + 1* (for Charlton Comics), and *Iron Fist* and *The Champions* (for Marvel), he eventually moved on to Marvel's number-one cult book, *X-Men* (not yet *Uncanny*) in 1977.

It was his work on *X-Men* that truly ignited Byrne's star, and from there he moved to *Captain America*, *The Avengers*, and a five-year run on Marvel's flagship title, *Fantastic Four*.

Seeking new heights to conquer, in 1986 Byrne accepted the daunting assignment of revamping the oldest and most famous of all superheroes, Superman. Beginning with the hugely successful *Man of Steel* miniseries, Byrne brought Superman back into the attention of the fans, and that success continues today.

Finally, in 1990, Byrne decided to at last venture into the unpredictable waters of creator-owned works, launching *John Byrne's Next Men* in 1991. Following that success, he brought out *Danger Unlimited* in 1994 and *Babe* in 1995.

With *John Byrne's Next Men* on temporary hiatus, Byrne currently writes and draws *Wonder Woman* for DC Comics. He is divorced and lives in Connecticut.

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